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ABSTRACT

This conference proceedings compiles a representative sample of the papers presented at the Institute of Early Childhood in July 2001, one in a series of conferences examining the challenges which the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy present the early childhood profession in Australia. The conference focused on the interpretation of experiences and interactions in the life of early childhood settings. The papers are: (1) "Rejoicing in Subjectivity: An Overview Based on a Personal Interpretation of the Schools for Young Children in the City of Reggio Emilia" (Jan Milikan), presenting one educator's interpretations of the early childhood programs in Reggio Emilia and discussing children's potentials, projects, collaboration, and documentation; (2) "Constructing Ourselves: A Search for Interpretation in a Diverse United States Setting" (Shareen Abramson), stressing the positive and negative aspects of the tensions associated with experiencing ideals from Reggio Emilia in schools in California; (3) "Unpacking the Gaze: Shifting Lenses" (Janet Robertson), challenging the gaze practitioners use to see children and interpret theory, particularly with relation to work with toddlers; (4) "Diversity Silenced" (Alma Fleet), considering possible interpretations of diversity through Australian pedagogical documentation; and (5) "Dialogue with Reggio: What Are Some Possibilities for Primary Schools?" (Lesley Studans), offering a personal journey to assist people considering implications of the ideas from Reggio Emilia in formal schooling environments. Most papers contain references. (KB)

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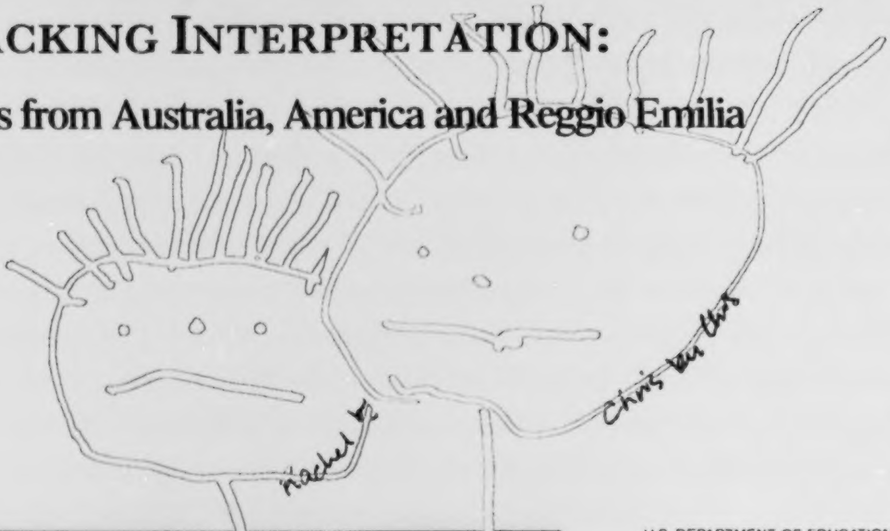
UNPACKING INTERPRETATION:

De-constructions from Australia, America and Reggio Emilia



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Selected conference papers from the 6th Unpacking conference

An annual conference hosted by the Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University

Held at the University of New South Wales, 16th and 17th July, 2001

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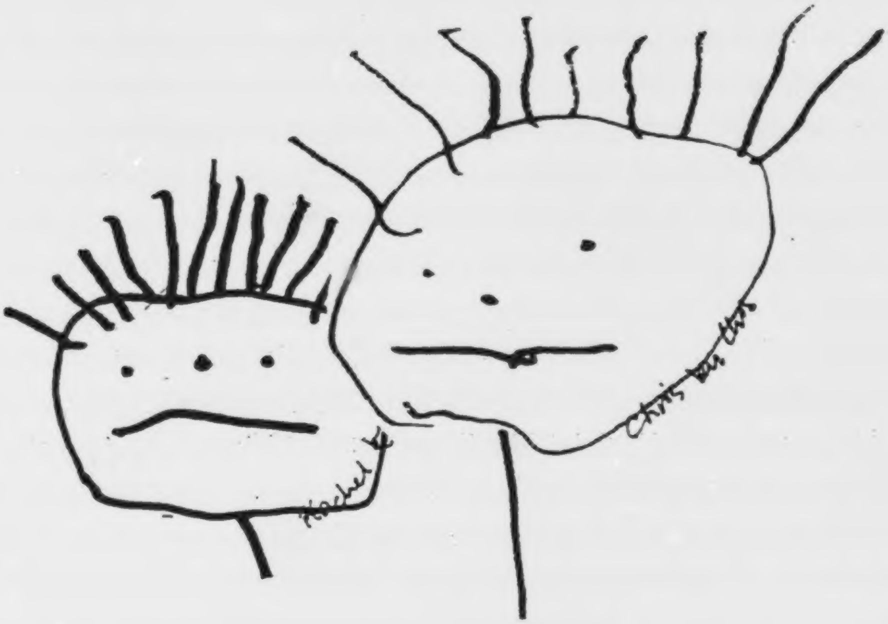

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Editorial

Alma Fleet and Janet Robertson

The occasion of the annual "Unpacking" conference at the Institute of Early Childhood has become an expected event on the early childhood professional calendar in Eastern Australia. As a site for professional discourse, it offers an opportunity to consider the challenges which are presented to us through the lens of our experience of the work evolving in Reggio Emilia, northern Italy. The conference provides an opportunity to introduce people to some of the key ideas and philosophies associated with those remarkable educators as well as to move beyond that forum into a uniquely Australian discursive site. Participants include a range of people who are attracted to the power of ideas and those who are seeking to review their own practices in the light of the thinking and experience of others involved in a similar pedagogical journey. Each year, the conference has a particular focus for consideration. In the past this has included a consideration of Environments, Observation and Documentation, and Time as a key component of early childhood practice. This year, the conference focussed on interpretation of experiences and interactions in the life of early childhood settings, as there was the opportunity to build on the launching of *Exhibit-on*, an intellectually creative event which enabled the celebration of work in New South Wales early childhood sites. That exhibition now has a catalogue of its own, and its power can be seen either as *Exhibit-on* is shown around the country, or through the images in the catalogue.

The collection of papers here represent a range of presentations from the conference. They include local and international keynote addresses as well as challenges from local teachers. We apologise if the paper you were looking forward to is not included in this collection. You are welcome to contact original presenters if you wish to follow up on anything which was shared during the conference.

Abramson offers an intepretation of the Reggio Emilia experience from work which is being undertaken in California. She stresses both the positive and negative concepts of the tensions associated with experiencing ideas from Reggio Emilia. Robertson challenges the gaze we use to see children and interpret theory, particularly with relation to work with toddlers. Fleet uses her unease with the elitist interpretations of ideas from

Reggio Emilia as a starting point for considering possible interpretations of diversity through Australian pedagogical documentation. Finally, Studans offers her personal journey to assist people who are considering the implications of the ideas from Reggio Emilia for people working in formal schooling environments.

We trust that these papers remind participants of their thinking during the conference, and open the doors for further conversations for those who were not involved in this particular exchange. The conversation is always ongoing. We look forward to your responses to these ideas and to your contributions in the future.

Alma and Janet

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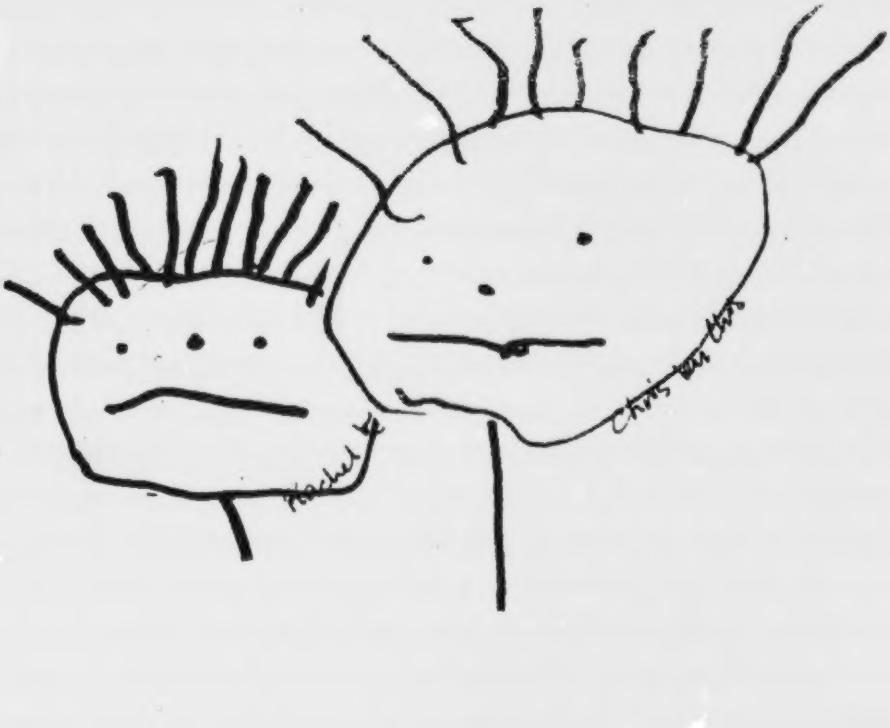
Rejoicing in subjectivity

An overview based on a personal interpretation of the schools for young children in the city of Reggio Emilia

Jan Milikan



Rejoicing in subjectivity

An overview based on a personal interpretation of the schools for young children in the city of Reggio Emilia

Jan Milikan

Reggio Emilia is a small city of 142,000 people in the wealthy region of Emilia Romagna Northern Italy, a short drive from the city of Bologna. The city is the 4th wealthiest in Italy and for the past few years has also been voted as the most livable city in Italy. There has been a considerable increase in the population in recent years, due to both immigration and the birth rate. Reggio Emilia has the highest birth rate in Italy and this is contrary to the trend in other Northern Italian cities; at the present time Italy actually has the lowest birth rate in the world. However, for the first time in its history the City of Reggio Emilia faces a multi-ethnic future. The city believes that the attention and commitment it dedicates to the education of young children is therefore even more essential for a future of civil co-existence where differences are valued rather than feared.

The Municipality of Reggio Emilia provides a remarkable system of early childhood education, which includes 21 preschools and 13 infant-toddler centres; it is these Municipal pre-schools that are now being acclaimed all over the world. Parents organised the first schools for young children in 1945, a few weeks after the end of World War 2. The first preschools, directly run by the city administration, commenced in 1963 and the first Infant toddler Centres opened in 1970.

The early childhood schools provide an educational program for children aged 3 months to 6 years; the programs are mostly organised in two separate locations. Infant Toddler centers for children less than 3 years of age, and pre-schools for children 3-6 years of age. There is no separation between education and care; all centres have an extended day program. In the Infant toddler centres, the children are organized into 4 age specific groups with one of the teachers remaining with the children for the three years they are in the centre. In the pre schools, there are usually 3 groups of 25 children with two teachers in each room working with age specific groups. Both teachers remain with the children for the three years they are in a particular centre.

Another educator in each of the pre-schools is known as the Atelierista. This person who will have a qualification or expertise in some area of the visual arts, has responsibility across all areas of the program and acts as a consultant and facilitator with children and teachers. In the Infant-toddler centers, the role of Atelierista is shared across three separate locations. Extended relationships between children, teachers, and families provide the foundation for learning and understanding for all those concerned with the program.

This collaboration between teachers and families has assisted in the development of a distinctive and innovative curriculum, and method of school organisation, which recognises the potential of children to question, reflect, problem-solve, theorise, experiment and express their findings. The importance of children collaborating together in constructing co-constructing their own knowledge is highly valued.

When provided with sufficient opportunities and time to experiment, explore, and play, and with the support of adults, children master the many tools and skills of communication and are able to actively translate what they perceive, not only through the spoken word, but also through other potent languages such as drawing, sculpture, sound, drama and movement. More importantly, at its core is the underlying philosophy of the creation of a citizen, at once ready and capable of affronting their future.

The system of education has evolved over the last 40 years. In the last 25 years this experience and the continuing project of research has attracted the attention of educators, administrators, architects, designers, researchers and politicians on an international scale.

The Schools of Reggio Emilia do not provide a model, but rather a provocation to reflect on theories and practice in our own schools. A willingness to put aside our certainties and to ask at least two questions of our selves "why" and "what if"

My guess is that many of you who are currently exploring or working with the ideas from the schools for early childhood in the city of Reggio Emilia have casually or not so casually mentioned the magic phrase "Reggio Emilia" and had an immediate response from your listener, "Oh what is that exactly?" "Just tell me in a few sentences" "Just give me the main focus" "Just in a nut shell." What would be your response to somebody who asks this sort of question? What are ten things that you think are the essence of Reggio? – your interpretation? Just in a nutshell.

Now I wonder if we would all write the same things?
And if not why not? If we had written the same words, would we give the same explanation of what those words mean. Would our explanations be somewhat different, or perhaps very different? What is our individual interpretation?

We have gained, or are gaining our information about Reggio through listening, and I am using the term listening in its broadest sense, with eyes, ears, intellect and emotions. This listening may have occurred in different circumstances. It might have been from visiting the schools in Reggio, or perhaps listening to others speaking about Reggio Emilia and viewing illustrative material. It might have been from reading, both what Reggio and others have said about their work. But to listen is an active verb, it is not just taking information in, it is also about interpreting the messages, trying to make sense and meaning, making connections, and constructing and co-constructing understanding.

Carlina Rinaldi, the senior pedagogical adviser for Reggio Children, suggests that often what we see is not what we are actually observing, but what we have in our minds. She suggests that each one of us develops our own personal theories, i.e. explanations of what is happening and why, and that quite often this has a value component of whether we think it should. We develop explanations that are satisfactory and satisfying for us. And these theories or explanations are affected by our previous experience. Our present knowledge and understanding, and this in turn is affected by our personal preferences, beliefs, and values.

Carlina suggests that behind the act of listening there can be a curiosity, a desire, a doubt, but always an emotion. So although for years I told my students that their observations of children must be objective. I now believe that observation always involves interpretation It is always subjective and always partial. However, to be able to acknowledge this, not only to ourselves but also to others, brings with it risk-taking and courage. To put aside our certainties and move out of our comfort-zone is never an easy thing to do.

I have now visited the schools for young children in Reggio Emilia on twelve different occasions. Nine of these visits have been as part of an Australian delegation. I remember on one occasion one of the Australian delegates asked me what I was going to do when everybody else was listening to the lectures. She had assumed that because I had heard the speakers on many occasions, that I knew it all. My response to this is: that the message is always a little different, because understandings in Reggio are continually on the move. But more importantly, I am not the same person, and therefore my interpretations will be different; but they will still be subjective.

I want you to accompany me on my journey as I revisit my interpretations. Not only are they subjective because of my personal experience, but they are also coloured by listening with my Australian cultural eyes. Entering another culture, where it is easy to pick up false clues and misunderstandings, immediately has an impact on our subjectivity. Another aspect is the Italian style of speaking and writing which is very different to our Australian way. We tend to favour linear, logical, direct organization, and economy in expression. The Italians by contrast are poetic, holistic and indirect, using a great deal of narrative, and symbolism. This is often very difficult to translate into meaningful English and adds another dimension to our interpretations.

I first heard about the early childhood programs in Reggio Emilia when I attended a NAEYC conference in the USA. I was excited about what I heard and wanted to know more. If I were to write down my interpretation at that time, I would have said:

Extending the children's intellectual development.
Amazing art work of the children.
So when I was offered the opportunity to take part in the first American delegation to visit the City. I jumped at the chance. I believed that then all would be revealed, I would understand it perfectly. I would have their recipe.
I was in for a shock.
I experienced many emotions on that visit:
Disbelief, amazement, confrontation, seduction.
And the things that I would have added to my list after that first visit. were:

Reflection of the City

Organisation

Environments

Projects

Potentials of children

And I want to return to them, in a few moments, but just briefly my first response to those things were as follows. I became aware that whatever was happening was very much tied to the city of Reggio Emilia, but I observed this on a very superficial level. The fact that I saw mirrors everywhere in the centers but I also saw them everywhere in the City. The fact that the Piazza squares of the City were also represented in the Centres that I visited. I heard that the city gave 12% of its total budget to early childhood education, which I viewed as an enormous commitment. I became aware of a strong collegiality and a complex structure of organization that valued and supported what was happening in the schools, but I didn't know what it was.

I was amazed at the environments that they were stunningly beautiful with wonderful colour and light, of the respect given to everybody and everything that was in those environments. Of spaces that honoured children and teachers. I was fascinated by additional equipment being used by the children including light tables, overhead projectors, slide projectors. Shadow screens, I thought they were wonderful additions to a classroom, and I still do, but what I didn't understand was that there was something highly significant in their inclusion.

I became aware through the documentation on the walls and through teachers telling their stories, that children, were involved in small group long term projects, and that the problem solving skills and engagement with sometimes unlikely topics was different from my experience. And that art (as I unknowingly referred to it at that time) seemed to be an integral part of the projects.

On that first visit, the educators did not elaborate on their image of the child, but I was aware that these seemed to be much more competent children than the ones I had worked with. This was evident in the documentation indicating the children's collaborative construction of knowledge, but also in observing the skills and engagement of the children.

I remember observing with some disbelief, as three year olds manipulated fine pens and brushes. I knew you had to give them those fat wax crayons; that's what three year-olds can manage. I was also amazed at the complexity of their drawings, but then it is actually very difficult to draw anything with those fat crayons. I did ask myself why I believed this, and knew that it was the influence of Developmentally Appropriate Practice, that had not only influenced my own teaching of young children, but also my role as a teacher educator and as a parent. My interpretation was that these educators were providing the opportunity and the encouragement for children to move beyond our usual expectations.

That first visit left me very confused. I believed that there was something very important happening in the schools for young children in Reggio Emilia. But I also knew that I didn't understand.

It was two years before I had the courage to speak about the schools, and that was only after I had visited the exhibition from Reggio Emilia in the USA. Visiting every day for a week, and in the evenings having the privilege of discussing the messages of the exhibition with Pam Houk the curator of the children's museum in Dayton, Ohio.

It is just ten years since I first spoke about the Schools of Reggio Emilia at an AECA conference in Adelaide. I spoke about Reggio as a project approach to Curriculum. I understand now that I seriously underestimated the complicated and ever-changing nature of their work. But firstly to return to some of my initial interpretations

Projects:

It is easy to understand that there are many projects taking place in the schools because of the documentation in the schools, where the walls speak, and because of the publications now available from the Reggio schools.

In Reggio Emilia, even the very youngest children are involved in projects that provide a way of children listening to each other and working together and assisting each other in their learning; with the role of teacher not as a transmitter of knowledge and culture but rather as a facilitator in children's construction of their own knowledge and culture. The child is viewed as a natural researcher, curious, imaginative in theory making, and in developing strategies in trying to make sense of the world.

The word 'project' does not have the same meaning that we would usually assume. It does not have the intention of finding out facts about a particular topic; it is not about finding right answers, but supporting children to find good questions in their collaboration with other children. Projects might involve the planning and making of a construction such as the amusement park for birds, or the planning and organizing of an event such as the long jump. Sometimes they are purely imaginative, and sometimes they address the larger issues of life, as in a recent publication from Reggio Children which addresses children's thinking about the future.

The following words are from Giovanni who is five and a half years of age:

> *There's a little door in the mountain of the future that takes you into a place where there are these words that don't mean anything...On top of the mountain of the future there's a path and a little man who can only go up hill, he can't go back down into the past, no way, he can only go on, and on...*
>
> *Instead on the mountain of the past, where the dinosaurs are, there's a little man that can go backwards, passing through all the years and all the times.*
>
> *But he can't really go – only if he remembers!*
>
> *In the middle there's a normal mountain – no different. It's a bit small because it was growing; it's the mountain of BEING – of the time of now – and that where I am, inside it. Thanks to this mountain, the mountains of the past and the future are separate – they don't get mixed up.*

Whatever form projects take, adults provoke children to think and problem solve together in constructing their reality. Projects are sometimes of short duration and sometimes long. They usually occur with small groups of children whilst other children are engaged in experimenting exploring and playing with a rich array of experiences, or working independently another aspect of the project.

The topics come from a variety of sources, but certainly not always from children. The Reggio educators do not talk about 'child centred', but rather 'child and adult centred', with learning occurring both within and between groups of children, teachers and parents. **Reciprocity** is an important word in Reggio Emilia.

The idea of documenting children's learning first began over thirty years ago as a form of Professional Development, where new teachers were required to observe and document children's participation in a variety of experiences that would subsequently be shared and discussed with other teachers. As the teachers began to interpret together, their documentation and the work of the children, they began to see that the children they were observing did not appear to be the same children they were reading about in the textbooks.

Instead, the children they were seeing were rich in resources in constructing their own meanings and possessed all the attributes of a researcher, urgently trying to make connections in all that they experienced in their social, physical and imaginary worlds. In this process, the teachers also had become researchers in the classroom as they collected and interpreted data and collaborated together in finding new insights into teaching and learning.

They decided that it was crucially important to listen to the children, and to support the children to develop many voices – the Hundred Languages of children, – and to make children's learning visible to the children themselves, for revisiting and reflecting, but also to teachers, and the wider community.

Since that first visit, I have had the further privilege of visiting Reggio Emilia with Australian delegations and had the opportunity to view the experience through the eyes of other Australians, to have the subjectivity of my interpretations enriched and countered by others, including those who have been excited by the programs and those who have been unimpressed or even concerned about what they have perceived.

I particularly owe a debt to participants in the first delegation and I particularly want to mention Janet Robertson, and also a wonderful group of people in Victoria who I work closely with.

But now to return to interpretations and misinterpretations of Reggio Emilia, and I want to return to the Image of the Child.

Image of the Child

The Reggio educators have considered a number of different images of the child and childhood. Many of these images see the child as fragile, with limitations and needing protection. Educators from Reggio Emilia have made a choice to define children as competent, and powerful, possessors of values and meanings, and most importantly rights as citizens and rights to realise their potentials. Perhaps in our interpretations of the Reggio Image of the child, we have not given significant attention to the rights of children.

Tzianna Fillipinni, an educator from Reggio says:

> *"Our Image of the Child has evolved out of our collective experience and of continually re- examining our understanding of different theories. For us each child is unique and the protagonist of his or her growth.*
> *From early in life children wish to acquire knowledge, are curious, able to be amazed, seek to create relationships, communicate with others, and negotiate with everything the culture brings to them through their social and physical world."*

And Loris Malaguzzi tells us that:

> *"All scholars, researchers and teachers, in any place, who have ended-up discovering not so much the limits and weaknesses of children, but rather their surprising strengths and capabilities linked with a great need for expression."*

The educators believe that this image presents a child that demands notice, curiosity and amazement. They demonstrate this image by making children visible through many different forms of Documentation. The title of a series of books they have published is called "The Unheard Voices of Children."

The following statement is often made:

> *"Reggio does not provide a model and what happens in the schools is inextricably tied to the city and the wider context of Italy itself. Therefore the only place you can have a Reggio school is in Reggio itself."*

My perception is that in interpreting the programs from Reggio Emilia, we have not given sufficient attention to what this statement actually means.

For instance, it is an Italian view that the years between birth and six are a precious resource of human potential. It is believed that this is a task that cannot be undertaken single-handed by either the family or the school, but one in which a forward-looking society must be prepared to invest responsibility. If children have legitimate rights, then they must also have the opportunities to realise their potentials. That first of all they must be taken seriously and believed in.

This view needs to be considered in the context of early childhood educational practice in Italy, which was born out of classic European pedagogy, Pestalozzi, Rousseau, Froebel, and Montessori. Susannah Mantovani, an educator from Milan, suggests that this pedagogy saw childhood as a period of life important in and for itself, that in Italy, as through much of Europe, early childhood has not been viewed as a "prologue" to real life that will take place only in later years. As a result, Italian parents, educators, and researchers, tend to be scarcely interested in, and even at times annoyed by, pressures towards evaluating child outcomes. They reject the exclusive promotion of particular educational practices or programs intended to measure, evaluate, and accelerate aspects of development in order to increase children's school performance in later years. It is interesting to note that visitors to the schools from outside Italy always ask the question, What happens to the children when they go to elementary school?

What are the longitudinal studies?
The Italians find these unusual questions.

The Reggio educators actively promote dialogues between the parent and the child, between educators and parents, between groups of educators and different families, and eventually extending to involve the whole community as an integral part of the program. "To feel a sense of belonging, to be part of a larger endeavor, to share meanings" These are considered the rights of teachers, children, and parents and an essential component of the educational process, and is reflected .in Loris Malaguzzi talking about a Pedagogy of Relationships and Carlina Rinaldi's view that this is enabled through a pedagogy of Listening.

This refers to communication, but they have deliberately chosen the word Listening because they believe it is the key to communication, but the part that we have perhaps not thought about carefully. What does it mean to listen? Sergio Spaggiari the Director of Early Childhood Education in Reggio Emilia suggests that it isn't an accident that we have two eyes and two ears but only one mouth.

Many of us who had been trying desperately to get a handle on exactly what was happening in Reggio were delighted and relieved when the first edition of *The Hundred languages of children: the Reggio Emilia Approach* was first published in the USA in 1993.

I was particularly delighted to read the interview with Carlina Rinaldi that explained the Reggio approach as emergent curriculum. But in fact when these interviews took place there was only one of the educators in Reggio who spoke English. In the interpretation from Italian to English the editors had decided that what Carlina was talking about was Emergent curriculum. It was their interpretation.

When Carlina became an English speaker, she was not content with this interpretation. Because although there are some aspects of the process of a project that could be described as emerging on some occasions, the description limits and tries to contain the complexity of their work

There followed many attempts to analyze what exactly this was if it wasn't emergent curriculum. George Forman came up with Negotiated curriculum, Lillian Katz believed it was closest to her Project approach; Rebecca New came up with Convergent curriculum. (A description that Reggio felt more comfortable with) And so on.

The educators of Reggio, in desperation I believe, came up with a devised name **Progettazione** a name that nobody could pronounce, or spell, much less interpret. In Carlina's words it means flexible planning, reflecting the Pedagogy of relationships and projected curriculum. In the second edition of the Hundred Languages of Children, the one with the red cover: *The Reggio approach: Advanced reflections* you will find a complete rewriting of Carlina's chapter.

If I was ask you all to write down a definition of the term "emergent curriculum", my guess is that we would have as many definitions as we have people. Firstly, it depends on our interpretation of the word curriculum. We could say it is everything that happens to the child in the school day, or the school itself in all its dimensions. However, what I believe Carlina was really saying was: Sometimes we might be engaged in a project that might be characterized as "emergent curriculum", but the next five projects might have a different form all together. More importantly it was a plea not to try and confine their work to an inadequate container, but to view what they do as an ever-evolving journey of adventures.

And now to collaboration

Which in my former interpretations I have tended to gloss over lightly, but which I now believe is one of the most important aspects of the Reggio principles and an integral part of the Pedagogy of Relationships and pedagogy of Listening.

Collaboration enables us to rejoice in subjectivity; it provides the opportunity to bring different realities together, enabling us to share wisdoms and create richer possibilities. But this is not easy. It means to genuinely listen to the other with respect, to be open to their ideas, when we usually prefer our own.

Many educators have discovered the difficulty of trying to engage children and adults in a true discussion. I just want to pause for a moment and examine the various words being used in this context. The word discussion (according to the Macquarie dictionary) is: A critical examination by argument and debate.

Reggio often use the word dialogue but it is not in relation to their own exchanges, but rather promoting a conversation with others outside their programs. The words we use are critically important because of the interpretation others will give. I am intentionally using the word discussion to mean critical argument and debate.

It is the debate, and the conflict in opinions, that allows the discussion to develop in a meaningful way. The Reggio educators are always ready to provide a provocation in children's discussions Introducing a conflicting point of view, or a question when necessary, to enhance the construction of knowledge. Where subjectivities are challenged, and knowledge and understanding are subsequently enriched.

The verbal discussion is crucial because it makes working together possible. In Reggio schools this verbal discussion is usually followed by a request for children to record their ideas in a graphic way. This is then followed by further discussion, then another graphic representation.

This is not considered to be art, although children have many opportunities to engage in a very free way with a wide range of media at other times. When it is involved in a project, the Reggio educators view it as symbolic representations that assist children in clarifying their thinking.

To ask the children to show us their thoughts in a graphic form sounds like a simple thing to do but in fact what we are asking children to do is quite difficult, because it means making strong selections. In any discussion there have been many words spoken. The children have to put aside many thoughts to which they have become attached. They are being required to organise their thoughts. In some ways it's like us being asked to write a paragraph about something when what we need to say is 3 pages long.

George Bernard Shaw once said:

"I'm sorry to write you such along letter but I didn't have time to write a short one."

But in fact it is more difficult because we are asking children to move to a different symbol system. From a spoken word to line drawing or painting clay wire, music, and so on. If we cut something from 3 pages to a paragraph we are still using the same symbol system, but we are asking children to represent their ideas in symbols other than words. So it is very important that we give children time to pause, and think and clarify their ideas before putting them on paper and making them visible to others. So when they draw, they are not only selecting ideas, but also discarding less important and confusing elements. With each step children move forward clarifying the problem. Malaguzzi also suggested that it is the collaborative process with other children that makes this so engaging because it brings many thoughts and actions together.

Children gradually understand that putting their ideas into this form of graphic representation allows them to communicate with others in another way. This is a very important discovery, but they also come to understand that in order to communicate successfully their graphic must be understandable to others. These graphic representations form the basis for the next discussion, with children explaining what they have drawn and why. This may happen with a teacher, in a group, or with friends.

This discussion has the effect of children wanting to return to their graphic representations, because with greater understanding they want to change their previous representations in some way. The graphic representations make children's thinking visible to themselves and others, so when children return to second discussions and drawings, the teachers see a remarkable change in both children's thinking and their ability to communicate in a graphic form. There is a systematic development of skills but only as children express a desire or need to have the skill.

Time and space are allowed to explore and experiment with every new media introduced. Every type of material presents different possibilities and restrictions. When children explore and experiment they are finding out about the material; they then need time to play. *What can I as an individual bring to this material?*

George Forman has coined the phrase 'Learning to draw, Drawing to Learn'. Children soon become aware that when they move from one language to another (paint, clay, wire, collage and so on-all on the same topic) each transformation generates something new. Each media bringing its own challenges but also new understandings.

Documentation

To understand Reggio is not easy, because it is strongly connected to its social, political, economics and history, and it continues to evolve as the educators discover more about teaching and learning from their own research as well as the research of others from many different disciplines. It also responds to the changing reality of modern society.

What ever our interpretations and subjectivities, I think it is worth the effort to understand their work not only because of the provocations they provide to reflect on our own theories and practice, but because of their ability to have drawn a world interest in young children, not only from educators but from administrators, politicians, and policy makers.

Malaguzzi describes the Reggio educational project, with its chosen image of the child, as a living system of schooling which reaches out to families, acknowledging their right to understand and to participate, with a further expansion towards the city, with its own life. A city that as Carlina Rinaldi, pedagogical adviser in Reggio Emilia, suggests, was and is still able to plan ahead, but most importantly has been able to provide a coherent direction for schools, making occasionally difficult choices that involve both quantity and quality as an inseparable pair. The city, in return is asked to adopt the children as with their own rights.

The school is viewed as an integral part of the city and has taken on the responsibility through advocacy and political engagement, to make the rich culture of childhood visible and assessable to the whole community, and to make possible a continuing dialogue related to teaching and learning. This visibility is possible because of the documentation occurring in the schools.

Community participation in education in Reggio Emilia gave recognition of the possibilities that parents and community members could provide for innovations in the curriculum, but also protection of services for children and families. These organisations were created with the specific purpose of "inventing" a school that would involve parents, teachers, citizens, and neighbourhood groups, not only in the running of the school, but also in defending the rights of children. However, it is also recognised that in order for participation to remain valid it must be guided by clear and thoughtful pedagogical considerations. In the city of Reggio Emilia this guidance is provided by the municipal administration. Howard Gardner suggests that it is the system of early childhood education that is the most significant aspect of Reggio Emilia.

But this is not a little paradise. It has been a continuous struggle and there are always difficulties to overcome. Malaguzzi, the inspirational founder and theorist behind the Reggio educational project once commented, "I have managed to preserve my world by always trying to change it".

Jerome Bruner has made the comment that Education is not just for children it is for the culture. A way of expressing our hopes for the future. A term Loris Malaguzzi expressed as "A nostalgia for the future". Bruner goes on to suggest that the idea of a locality and a sense of local identity are essential. This is at the very heart of the Reggio educational project, with their example of living within a locality and being conscious of its values and traditions, but through this sense of locality being more able to appreciate the universal. The Reggio project is a local idea but it has inspired an international movement; its international message is that we must take our local educational project seriously.

What future do we have before us? Much, or perhaps everything will depend on the choices we make and on the awareness we develop as to the values and ethics that will guide these choices.

Among the many choices to be made, one in particular will be fundamental for our future: the identity, the reality, the image that we give to children and their education.

I believe the experience of the City of Reggio Emilia provides a mirror to better examine these initial questions, to discover the questions that we might need to ask of our selves. To find the right questions is even more difficult I believe, than finding answers.

So can we collaborate to bring our subjectivities together not only in relation to Reggio with its challenges and provocations, but in our own localities? Are we prepared to question our interpretations and subsequent certainties?

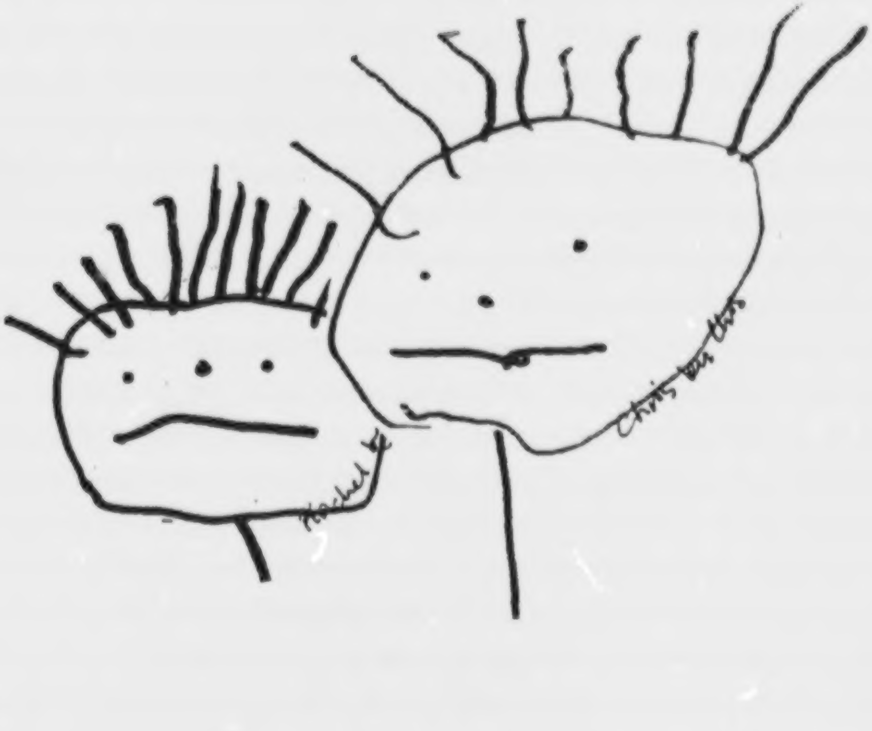
Collaboration is very difficult, but it also allows us the opportunity to rejoice in subjectivity. I conclude with the optimistic voice of a child in the project of exploring the future. In her collaboration with others she interprets her dreams for the future in a precious optimism I believe we must all share.

The
Future is tomorrow
and I can only imagine it
But I think it's a lovely day.

Jan Milikan is the Australian liaison for the educators in Reggio Emilia. She works in Melbourne.

Constructing ourselves: A search for interpretation in a diverse United States setting

Shareen Abramson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Constructing ourselves: A search for interpretation in a diverse United States setting

Shareen Abramson

The schools of Reggio Emilia have prompted early childhood educators all over the world to reevaluate and revise their beliefs about young children and the nature and quality of early experiences that support children's development. Educators who have visited or studied the schools quickly recognize the educational potential of the Reggio Emilia Approach for developing children's intellectual, creative and social competence and strengthening the identities of parents, teachers and the community. However, educators face challenge and uncertainty as they think about how to interpret these ideas in their own context to begin a change process.

In order to transform their educational setting, those wanting to advance their understanding of the Reggio Emilia Approach seek out others who are also finding their way. While there is no substitute for a delegation visit to Reggio Emilia, study groups, roundtables, networks, conferences and symposia offer educators analogous experiences: exploring historical, philosophical and theoretical ideas, viewing documentation of children's work and visits to Reggio inspired schools. Through attending professional development programs like this Symposium provoked by Reggio Emilia now in its sixth year, even a country as large as Australia takes on the intimacy of a community that includes connection, participation and dialogue.

Much like a school in Reggio Emilia, the social context of professional development programs--sharing varied perspectives and building relationships--promotes continued development and strengthens the ability for individual and collective action. Through these repeated encounters with colleagues and content, we become a "community of learners." Or as more aptly described by Victoria Fu (2002), we become a "community of the mind" having a profound intersubjectivity yet able to surmount physical, geographical, socio-cultural and programmatic boundaries.

In the United States, an expanding network of programs are attempting interpretation of the principles and practices from schools in Reggio Emilia. Many of these Reggio inspired programs began their study of the approach during the 1990's and a number now have more than five years, some even 10 years of experience in this work. In the near future, this loose network may become a more formalized association or alliance.

At the recent US conference held in Blacksburg, Virginia, "Recasting the Reggio Emilia Approach: Landscape of Possibilities," presentations were made by representatives from some of these US-affiliated programs. Almost all of the presenters were part of the "Lugano-Reggio Collaborative," a group of educators who together visited Reggio Emilia (and the Lake Lugano area) in 1998 and collaborated in writing a new book on US interpretations, *Teaching and learning: Collaborative explorations of the Reggio Emilia approach* (Fu, Stremmel & Hill, 2002).

In making their own interpretations, this new cast of players is reconstructing the Reggio Emilia Approach in US settings, writing new and never-before-told stories. I can truly say that we left the conference still "inspired" by Reggio but also inspired by these US visions of exemplary practice. Not only in the company of US colleagues, but daily in the center with children, parents and teachers, we realize more and more not only how much we can learn from Reggio but how much we can learn from each other. This realization is, in fact, the essence of the Reggio Emilia Approach, "that all knowledge emerges in the process of self and social construction" (Rinaldi, p. 115).

Several presenters at the recasting conference put forward the term "tension" in describing the effect of the Reggio Emilia Approach. For Deborah Tegano (Tegano, 2002), tension is synonymous with the disequilibrium experienced by both new and veteran educators. For Carol Brunson-Day, tension occurs as a result of the mismatch between some Reggio and US practices (Brunson-Day, 2001June).

What is tension, exactly? In researching the term, some definitions focus on the outward manifestations: "the act or action of stretching" and "either of two balancing forces causing or tending to cause extension." Other definitions seem more inwardly directed: "The stress resulting from the elongation of an elastic body" or "Inner striving, unrest, or imbalance often with physiological indication of emotion." While most definitions have a negative connotation, "A state of latent hostility or opposition between individuals or groups" other definitions have, paradoxically, a positive feeling: "A balance maintained in an artistic work between opposing forces or elements."

Increasing tension incrementally may produce anxiety, stress, conflict and ultimately, warfare. The release of tension also may have varying effects, with the potential for energy, relaxation, calmness and a feeling of control. However the complete absence of tension, like teaching the same curriculum day-in and day-out, may lead to fatigue, boredom, stagnation and burn-out.

Thus tension must be understood as having a continuum of effects. Much like the interweaving of threads from the bobbin and spool in sewing or the tuning of strings on a violin, sufficient tension is a condition necessary for performing well. Just the right amount of tension is associated with intensity, balance and creative excellence, although many other factors, such as ability and talent, also come into play.

Reggio educators emphasize again and again that "conflict is good." As Carlina Rinaldi (1998) explains:

> *Conflict and the recognition of differences are essential, in our view. Conflict transforms the relations a child has with peers – opposition, negotiation, listening to other's point of view and deciding whether or not to adopt it, and reformulating an initial premise – are part of the processes of assimilation and accommodation into the group. We see these dynamics . . . [as] an essential element of democracy.* (p. 118).

But as Brunson-Day points out, "conflict" causes discomfort to American educators who value conflict resolution and see conflict as likely to be violent and dangerous in a society already consumed by excessive violence. Perhaps a better way to frame this idea for some of us would be to say that "tension is good."

Tegano (2002) comments that those engaged in the study of the Reggio Emilia Approach are imbued with a passion for teaching and have an invigorating "intellectual vitality," described as "action laced with emotion." This feeling of vitality is suggestive of the optimum level of tension that is strengthening, energizing and renewing.

The notion of tension may also be useful in illuminating those aspects of practice that must be addressed to make an interpretation of the approach – whether in the US, Australia or anywhere outside of Reggio Emilia – relevant, meaningful and appropriate to the context.

There appear to be two sources from which this tension arises. First, the pull emanates from Reggio Emilia, as the result of introducing us to such principles and practices as the image of the child, parent and community participation, collaborative teaching, value of time, projects, documentation and advocacy for social justice. US educators aspire to reexamine and reinvent programs for our children based on these ideas. Our aspirations seem to be within the realm of possibility and in our "zone of proximal development." According to Jeanne Goldhaber (2002), this act of risk-taking is a courageous choice that enhances our identity and sense of community. Thus tension stretches us to achieve our fullest potential as teachers.

We are indebted to Reggio Emilia for generating this necessary tension. Although services are now more widely available, there have been few significant changes in early childhood education in the US since the mid-1970's. One could even say our conception of practice has been in the doldrums, too little in the way of tension. As Rebecca New (1993) and Gunilla Dahlberg, Peter Moss and Alan Pence (1999) emphasize, statements of what is and what is not developmentally appropriate practice convey smugness in their certainty about what is quality early childhood education. Such absolutist thinking--that there is a universal standard of quality - is out of sync with postmodernist conditions, cultural differences and subjective realities.

Encounter with Reggio Emilia - for myself, the two visits made in 1992 and 1994 - are both uplifting and unsettling. These conflicting, disjointed emotions occur for many visitors (Tegano, 2002). In the words of Reggio educators, their schools are "provocative," breathtaking, even earthshaking. For some US programs, the study of the approach has precipitated an unending yet satisfying "projettazionne," of program development and research, a project full of great discoveries, adventure and unlimited possibilities. As we begin to "listen" not only to children but also "listen" more to parents, we have new insights, form new hypotheses and revise or discard old ones.

There is of course, an opposing tug to the tension calibration. For some US educators, the Reggio Emilia Approach, for a variety of reasons, does not devote enough attention to major educational issues that concern US programs such as ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, mandates for assessment and standards, early literacy, nutrition education and the outdoor play environment. These areas define some important differences between Reggio Emilia and the US. Moreover the search for interpretation must take place in a US context without the cultural values and social support for the well-being of children and families that are ever present in the community of Reggio Emilia.

To understand the "image of the child" in a given setting or culture, one might begin by looking at its reflection, the "image of child care" (Fraser, 2000). Based on her research, Australian researcher Denise Fraser concludes that child care policy in Australia, like that in the US, is driven almost exclusively by economic considerations, a finding that "leaves open to question the value we place on our children" (p. 5). For most of the world, there is a tremendous need for "conceptual leadership" able to "advocate for children's services as a benefit to the child, the family and society at large" (Fraser, p. 1).

Every child deserves to have the best care and education that we can give. University early childhood centers, such as Mia-Mia here in Sydney and like our Huggins Center in Fresno, serve critical functions in providing leadership and visibility as to what child care should be like, not just for the field, but for society at large. Because these centers are closely connected with academic programs, new teachers entering the profession receive training based on the most current thinking and research. Through experiences in these settings, they are prepared for their role as advocates for children.

Before embarking on a visual tour of the Huggins Center, we need to keep in mind that our respective cultural baggage is not so easily unpacked. Lilian Katz, (1999) makes some of the following observations in relation to cross-cultural exchanges:

1. This is a US experience, and may not be applicable to those from a different context. Nevertheless our common field of interest helps us understand one another better.
2. For our field, we have similar concerns over low pay, low status and the inadequate training required to do one of the most important jobs there is.
3. One of the strongest movements crossing international boundaries is the great desire of early childhood educators to know more about the Reggio Emilia approach. (Katz, 1999).

As Rinaldi (2000) reminds us, values define cultures and a culture is determined by its values. Appreciation of culture differences has value because "in order to educate ourselves, we have to understand the differences" (Rinaldi, 2000).

Joyce M. Huggins Early Education Center

The Joyce M. Huggins Early Education Center (Huggins Center) is a training, demonstration and research center in early childhood education that opened in 1994. The Huggins Center is a model for best practices in early childhood education strongly influenced by the study of the Reggio Emilia Approach. It is the mission of the Huggins Center to give impetus to local and state educational reform efforts aimed at improving early childhood education, curriculum, interprofessional collaboration and services to children and families. It includes three preschool rooms, two infant-toddler rooms, one school-age room, kitchen, offices, studio, parent resource area, observation rooms and instructional classrooms. The 30,000 square foot "Environments Playground" is a science education area that includes a redwood forest, aquatic study area, water and sand play structures, gardens and other unique aspects.

The center has a state-of-the-art facility and an exemplary curriculum influenced by the study of the Reggio Emilia Approach. The center provides an ideal setting for observation, training, demonstration and research for university students, other students and educators interested in learning about the latest methods for early childhood education. The center has been the recipient of numerous grants and awards for its innovative programs.

Visitors observing the classrooms in the center are able to see through one-way observation windows how ideas from Reggio Emilia's schools can be put into practice in an American setting, providing a starting point for newcomers to the approach.

The Reggio Emilia Approach is discussed in detail in Edwards, Gandini and Forman's *The Hundred Languages of Children* (1993, 1998). The main features that have inspired work at the Huggins Center include:

Community commitment

Over the last 30 years, Reggio Emilia has developed a publicly funded system of early childhood education that serve 35 percent of infant/toddlers and 47 percent of preschoolers in the community. Children with special needs are fully included in the schools.

Huggins Center interpretation

The Huggins Center is committed to the welfare of children and families of the university community. Student parents at the university have priority in utilizing the center with those having greatest financial need served first. Through a combination of state and federal grants, 150 low-income children of students receive subsidized child care. Other student parents not requiring subsidy, faculty and staff have the next priority in enrolling children. Through an innovative arrangement with the local Fresno Unified School District, 12 children with special needs are also enrolled with a public school special education preschool teacher assigned to the Huggins Center to support their inclusion. More than 150 children ages three months to twelve years are enrolled in this full-day program. Elementary students participate in an after-school enrichment program. The facility, both indoors and outdoors, is designed so that children with special needs have full access to the program.

Collaborative relationships

Loris Malaguzzi, the director of the Reggio preschools for 40 years, involved staff, parents, children and the community in a continuing dialogue around the development and management of programs responsive to their welfare. Reciprocity and interaction characterize relationships among these participants. According to Malaguzzi, "our goal is to create an amiable school - that is, a school that is active, inventive, livable, documentable, and communicative . . . a place of research, learning, revisiting, reconsideration, and reflection . . . where children, teachers and families feel a sense of well-being. . . ." (Malaguzzi, 1993). Staff collectively participate in making decisions and teachers work in co-teaching pairs. An active home-school partnership is facilitated through a parent advisory council at each school. Because children stay with the same teacher for three years, relationships are further cemented. In Reggio, the social context of learning is stressed as well as civic responsibility for the educational system.

Huggins Center interpretation

Strong collaborative relationships exist among staff, families and programs at the university. By using a continuity of care model and multi-age grouping, children stay with the same teacher for three years. An energetic, participatory Advisory Board meets regularly. Parent involvement is encouraged through monthly activities such as potlucks, speakers, discussions, etc. and such volunteer activities as the lunch buddy program that provides a free lunch to parents who assist the children at lunchtime, garden maintenance and materials donation.

Parents and university students have played a critical role in advocating for additional resources for the center. In 1997, student parents initiated a campus-wide referendum to provide more funding from students to support the center as a campus resource. During their campaign, student parents met with leaders and members of more than 50 different campus organizations. As a result, the referendum passed with a 66% yes vote and the highest turn-out of students for any election previously held.

A unique philosophy

The philosophy of Reggio schools draws on a number of constructivist theories but is often described in terms of the "image of the child." The image held by Reggio educators is one of a rich child with rights and limitless potential.

Huggins Center interpretation

The philosophy of the Huggins Center reflects current early childhood education and child development theory and research. This philosophy of education and care is based on: 1) Understanding of the importance of the family and community in the lives of children; 2) Respect for children's ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds; 3) Recognition that collaborative, participatory relationships among children, parents, teachers and others that not only create powerful and successful education and care programs but improve the quality of life in the community; 4) Commitment to the rights of all children to receive education and care services that maximize their developmental potential; 5) Knowledge of the contribution of a stimulating, educationally-rich environment to children's constructive efforts to make sense of their world; and 6) The belief that proper guidance of children occurs in an atmosphere of respect for persons, positive human relationships, non-violent conflict resolution and cooperation.

Preparation of the environment

Reggio teachers view the environment as a "third teacher". Careful attention is given to the educational, aesthetic and social dimensions of the environment. School interiors and grounds are beautiful and a source of pride for children, teachers, parents and the community.

Huggins Center interpretation

Both the classroom and outdoor environments have been designed to relate to the community context. Attention is given to the aesthetics and organization of the classrooms and the playground. Objects and artifacts from diverse cultural sources that are part of Fresno's heritage are incorporated in the indoor environment and learning materials. Our "piazza" is the "Environments Playground," a science education area for ecological studies, early agricultural education and investigations of the physical world as well as active play.

Project-Based curriculum

Much of the curriculum in Reggio is based on long-term projects. These projects are unique in several ways. Distinguishing aspects include: small group projects rather than whole-class; topic selection based on student questions, interests and experiences; collaboration among students, teachers and parents on project activities; content of the project emerging from students' evolving understanding and not a set of prepackaged activities; extended, multiple experiences with media to represent understandings;

repetition of activities for different purposes; length of time devoted to a project; and project documentation. Rather than "covering" the curriculum or a project teachers and children together "uncover" a project. Projects develop the language, literacy, scientific, mathematical and social knowledge of all children. Small groups are the preferred instructional organization because they provide a social context that fosters meaningful dialogue, collaborative problem-solving and productive "conflict" among children. Group projects such as murals and other large-scale, collaborative endeavors like constructing a dinosaur are encouraged (Rankin, 1998). Parents interact frequently with teachers both formally and informally and are involved in curriculum development activities, discussion groups and special events.

Huggins Center interpretation

A project-based curriculum offers meaningful and provocative topics that are multi-faceted and interesting. Investigations at the Huggins Center in the past few years have included growing a garden, building an arbor, families, musical instruments, constructing a door for the playhouse and pond investigations. These projects allow children to develop their language, literacy, mathematical, scientific, creative and reasoning skills. Project work is typically undertaken by a small core group of children while others enter for some activities. In developing projects, teachers hold group discussions, converse with individual children, talk with parents about the project and how to participate, document comments, observations and questions, assist children in representing understandings in a variety of media, experiment with activities and materials and analyze and project curriculum during weekly staff meetings.

Multiple languages

According to educators in Reggio Emilia, the arts—painting, drawing, music, dance, drama, clay, paper, puppetry, etc.—are like "a hundred languages," affording multiple paths for symbolic thinking, learning and communicating ideas (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). The belief that early artistic and creative education are critical to intellectual development echoes Howard Gardner's theory (1985) of "multiple intelligences" which includes linguistic, musical, logico-mathematical, spatial-aesthetic, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal sources of intelligence. Pretend play is another form of symbolic functioning essential to development of children.

Each school has a large "atelier" (studio/resource room) staffed by an "atelierista " or studio teacher who works with teachers. The studio teachers assists the children and other teachers in becoming versed in the arts and media (Vecchi, 1998) and participates in planning, implementing and documenting project work. The atelier offers a multitude of materials and supplies for children's use. Each classroom has a "mini-studio" for additional experiences.

Through creative expression, the enormous potential for development present in every child can be fully realized. Malaguzzi (1998) believed that "creativity should not be considered a separate mental faculty but a characteristic of our way of thinking, knowing and making choices." During classroom projects, children – individually, in pairs or in small groups—engage in active exploration of a topic or problem and seek to represent their understandings in different of media. Students may draw, work in clay, construct in wire, paint a mural or perform a shadow or puppet play as part of project studies. When children express what they know and what they have learned in project work via symbolic representations in visual arts and other modes such as musical performance, drama, manipulative constructions, etc., adults have a potent means for accessing children's perception and understanding of their world.

Huggins Center interpretation

The expressive arts are "core" to the program at the Huggins Center. Physical areas within the center include a small atelier and outdoor "pottery barn" where children use the potter's wheel, glaze and fire clay. The atelier and classrooms include clay and other expressive art experiences as part of the daily program. A studio teacher is part of the teaching team. Through affording multiple paths for symbolic expression, learning through the expressive arts is especially compelling in reference to those children from diverse backgrounds that the standard curriculum often fails to reach. Representing thinking in multiple modes or "languages" helps to build concepts and skills of diverse children, particularly those who are language learners, bridging differences among children and between the children and teacher (Abramson, Ankenman, & Robinson, 1995).

Documentation

Documentation is a visual account of learning. It consists of a formal, systematic, selective presentation that may include observational notes, photographs, audio-tapes, video, and/or the actual products of children's work (Rinaldi, 1998). Documentation serves as an individual and collective "memory" of activities, a method for reflecting on learning that leads to new experiences, a way of sharing learning with others (Vecchi, 1998). Documentation is everywhere in Reggio Emilia schools. Because documentation can be made public when installed as panels in the school, it can be equally accessed and discussed by all, including those who are daily in the school-teachers, parents, children, as well as others on whom the school depends for support – community members, business leaders and politicians. Documentation is recognized as a unique contribution of Reggio Emilia to early childhood education (Katz, & Chard, 1996). Documentation yields rich images of children and their learning. Through the documentation process, teachers gain skills in observing, listening and respecting the voices of children.

Huggins Center interpretation

The Huggins Center teachers capture the progress of the project and student learning by making photographic, audio, video and web-based records of children and project work. The challenging, nature of project explorations as is evident in documentation panels offers a striking contrast to the superficial, rote curriculum seen in many US early childhood programs today.

Professional development

Continuous professional development is integral to the Reggio Emilia Approach. This is the role of the pedogogista, who serves several schools, offers professional development experiences, collaborates on projects with teachers and acts as a conduit for pertinent research and information from school to school.

For the last 20 years, Reggio Emilia has expanded its influence far beyond its boundaries through hosting numerous educational delegations from throughout the world and sponsoring professional development programs in the US and other countries to promote the exchange of ideas on issues and problems central to education and improvement of schools.

Another tool for professional development and means for fostering educational change on the international level is the touring "Hundred Languages of Children" Exhibition (HLC exhibit). The HLC exhibit was organized in the early 1980's by the schools in Reggio Emilia to encourage the study of their educational experience as well as to reveal the enormous potential for learning of young children. The HLC exhibit has traveled all over the world, deeply affecting those who have encountered the work of these schools in promoting children's learning and creativity.

Huggins Center interpretation

In addition to ongoing professional development for staff, the center sponsors a variety of professional development activities for students and educators. More than 300 students in a variety of majors utilize the center each semester for student teaching, observation, research and other course-required experiences. More than 300 visitors from schools, other agencies and the community observe in the center annually.

In Fall, 1998, the HLC exhibition was on display in the Huggins Center. More than 4000 visitors saw the HLC exhibit, attended professional development programs and observed in the center. Documentation panels now on exhibit in the Huggins Center corridors, replaced the HLC exhibit with work of our own children, providing subjects for discussion and reflection. Children, parents, teachers, education faculty, student teachers and visitors from other schools and agencies never seem to tire of examining these wonderful dramatic images of learning as it unfolds.

For two years, the center has offered, "A Hundred Languages for Learning: The Expressive Arts in Early Childhood Education," as a follow-up to the HLC exhibit and to examine the role of the arts in education. The institute was intended to help educators develop more background in the arts and projects through interactive sessions with artists.

Studies of adult learners reveal that adults, like children, require visual examples and time to practice putting ideas into action. Active learning projects for adults should include the following elements: sufficient time to discover ideas, solve problems and create projects; adequate resources; encourage both active engagement and reflective thought; and challenge participants to think beyond current knowledge base (Piscitelli, 2000). To be successful in integrating visual arts, teachers must acquire the knowledge and skills for working with the arts, experience a wide range of art materials methods and processes guided by those expert in arts education (Taunton, & Colbert, 2000).

Institute participants came to realize the value of nurturing their own creative capacities not only for professional and personal growth. Hopefully institute participants will continue to seek out training and partnerships with artists in an effort to further their own creative development as well as the expressive abilities of the children.

Through our center's participation in professional development initiatives we have discovered what may be Reggio Emilia's best kept secret: continual professional development with constant exposure of the school to outside scrutiny is an invaluable means for keeping teachers learning and reflecting in a climate of healthy tension. This level of tension is inherent in the growth process that occurs through education. In the words of John Dewey, the result of education is "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (Dewey, 1916).

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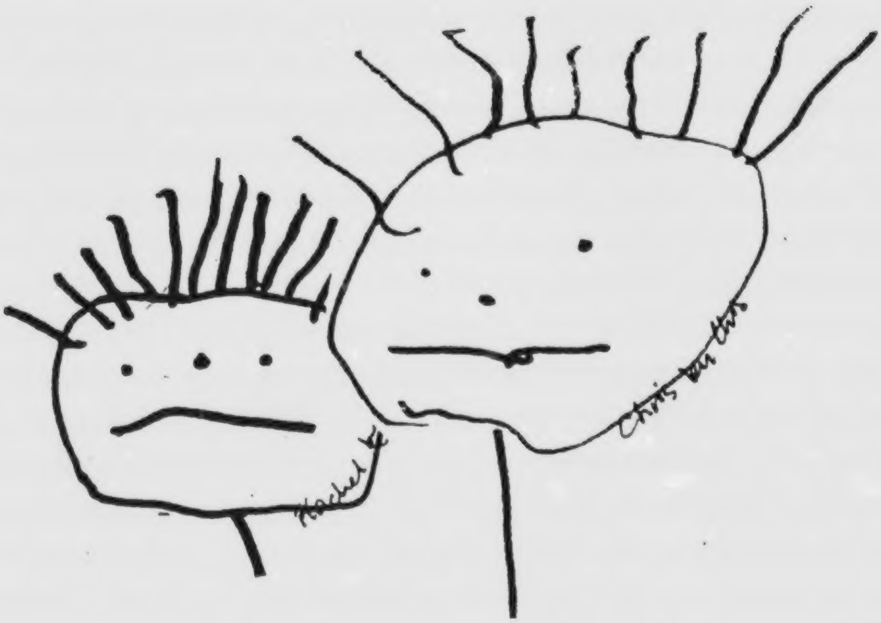
Unpacking the gaze: Shifting lenses

Janet Robertson



Unpacking the gaze: Shifting lenses

Janet Robertson

Introduction:

At this, the sixth unpacking conference, I find myself struggling with thoughts, arguments, and ideas about interpretation, gaze, subjectivity and education. The struggle I'm having is that I'm still struggling. Surely after all these years I'd have a set speech and just spout it. Surely by now I'd know! Well I don't. Unlike the X Files, "The truth is not out there"(Jipson and Bailey, 2000) for me to find, grasp and say, "I've got it"! There is no one truth about Reggio Emilia, or anything else. The more I try to think ideas of reconceptualising education, the more I try to construct our own image, not that of others. To help you enter my struggle, I thought I would shape this paper about the notion of gaze, and help you see with my lenses the muddle before me. I will discuss 'the gaze', then relate it to experiences I have had with children, unpacking and shifting lenses as I do.

Gaze argument

So what is 'the gaze'? For all of us, whatever life we lead, we construct our notions, and our meaning of the world through the 'gaze'. We filter what we hear and see through this 'gaze'. Professionally, as I say, "The child you see is the child you teach" or as Glenda MacNaughton puts it, "particular conventions structure how a teacher looks (gazes) at children" (MacNaughton 2000, p. 74). So it would seem we need to focus on our focus and gaze upon our gaze. But why ?

When I spoke of the muddle I was in, it is because I'm now of the opinion that whatever 'gaze' we have, the lens through which we are gazing, obscures other possibilities. Oh how simple it would be to swap one gaze for another and that would be it. The child development gaze for the Reggio Emilia gaze for instance. Or that one gaze is better than another is, all the time. But life is not easy and so education should not be either. No one lens through which to gaze will do. So what lenses do we use? I wondered if the real metaphor of lenses or glasses would carry me through this paper. In this instance, I use the notion of lens to straddle both the larger gaze as well as the intimate teacher's gaze which occurs whilst in the midst of 'teaching'. So I will try. I hope in doing so it will illustrate the many layered and multi faceted sides of the gaze and interpretation.

Let us begin with the lenses we are all born with. Everybody who does wear glasses, take them off. What can you see now? At first, from my perspective, I might say, 'not a lot', but then as I relax I start to appreciate the colours, and the impressionist painting you all make in front of me. Without glasses, colour takes on a primal element. I cannot identify individuals, but your group-ness is evident. I also can't hear very well, it is now I realise how much I rely on sight to hear. I also look different, when I take my glasses off at school, the children fall silent, as though I've suddenly become naked.

Next let us dwell within the past. Wearing an old pair of glasses, with lenses which no longer suit my eyes, I have to fight nausea and giddiness. Why? My brain expects to be able to see when my arm makes the gesture of putting lens to face. When the vision is blurred my brain makes heroic attempts to adjust, hence the nausea and unbalance. Is this what we feel when we unearth the origins of our professional gaze? Unbalanced? "There is a need for continual scrutiny of the past, not for the sake of the past, but for the sake of the present" p.6 (Hultqvist and Dahlberg 2001) So what do we need to gaze upon from the past? Perhaps the scientific modernist slant towards observing young children? (Cannella 1999; Dahlberg 1999) This so called objective gaze at children as the research 'subject' has pervaded our everyday work with young children. We are supposed to be objective, removing ourselves from a subjective stance: as Jan has said, we should rejoice in subjectivity, gazing with the child not upon the child, whist being aware of the influences inherent in our gaze.

What were, and are, the lenses, which shaped, and are shaping theory? We learn the constructions of theory at the academies of early childhood, University, TAFE and institutions and use these theories to support existing practices, such as QIAS, KLA's or our regulations. However, the power base, and assumptions which shape these theories are and should be continually questioned. Not necessarily to throw out, but to better understand the discourse shaping the theory. Take developmental theory: Dahlberg and Hultqvist in this year 2001, critique developmental theory, [there is] "a growing body of research which demonstrates that early developmental discourse relied on racist thought and excluded all but those children with the right signs: being white, middle class, and living under orderly conditions, preferably in small towns on the US east coast" (Hultqvist and Dahlberg 2001, p.6). When I first started to track these disruptions to the dominant discourse of developmental theory, the first quotes were from Rebecca New in late 1980 and 1990's. Her modest scholarly words, held none of the power of 'racist' which is now levered by Gunilla and Kenneth, although inferring the same thing The continual critique of what was taken as 'a truth' has altered the way developmental discourse is used now, opening other opportunities for 'other thinking' to occur. However, there is not time here to unpack every historical gaze, which influences our present day gaze. Neither is there time to make judgements about that history. Only enough time to be aware that it matters, and that it should be factored into every examination of current gaze. I once wore these scientific modernist glasses and saw then clearly what is blurred now. My understanding of what was clear is now unbalanced.

Now pass your glasses to the person sitting next to you. And you try theirs on. Mmmmm. Pass them back. Now, order restored, it would seem that you can't lend your glasses to someone else for them to 'see' what you 'see'. For some of you, it may have been only a slight difference, for others, a canyon of optical challenges. For all of us our gaze is subjective, it is our own, no matter how shaped by past lenses, lives and loves. So the difficulty of explaining our gaze to another becomes clearer. Even so called commonly held 'truths' within our profession are not common, and are always coloured by our own intimate and personal gaze. The uncomfortable example I can give you here is the arguments Alma and I had about the splendid Exhibit-on, which resides downstairs. In the end, to preserve our friendship, we had to resort to talking to each other on email about decisions we were making, as we had become bewildered by the gulf that lay between us. Tongue-tied by our need to agree, and by nice-ness, written words became the way we could express our intimate gaze and agony. One evening's email went like this,

> *Dear Alma, "My personal agony is over our, you and me, own desire to agree... is this a girl thing? ... and this fundamental intellectual gulf is perplexing. But I actually think it is very healthy ... we each bring a strong personality to the job and a*

> *very subjective stance ... our interpretations are colored totally by what we see as the point of the Exhibit-on. Love Janet"*
>
> *Dear Janet, "Wanting to agree may be a girl thing - the fundamental need to communicate richly- but in this case I think it also has a lot to do with the fact that we each have a profound respect for the other's intelligence and insight- so when we seem to be seeing different things, it becomes frustrating- terribly un-postmodern of us, not to expect multiple realities and layers of interpretation. Sleep well, Alma"*

I don't think our experience is unique. Discussing closely held values and thoughts, and arguing for them within a discussion, is something we can all find prickly and difficult. How do we discuss multiple perspectives without it becoming personal? Seeking ways in which to make clearer what lenses we gaze through is a hallmark of intellectual rigor and transparency. I know both of us are richer for our email experience.

Just touching on the notion of the tourist gaze, at least half of the work in Exhibit-on has been done by teachers who have not been to Reggio Emilia, but who have been engaged in thinking about the challenges which arise from Reggio Emilia. I dearly love to dispel the myth that 'you have to go to know'. I might also add that none of the children have been to Reggio either. Many folk become blinded, a sort of snow blindness, after a trip to Reggio, and become unable to move in any direction. Crippled by the splendor they have gazed upon, the memory of their gaze immobilizes engagement with the ideas. Of course, many folk who go, don't get snow blindness, but going does not immure you from the possibility.

Further more, what you see when you gaze upon Exhibit-on is not what the person next to you sees. Apart from the difficulty about how people engage in exhibitions, and our need not to copy the 100 Languages exhibition, and rather make one of our own understandings, the process of being within an exhibition as a spectator is different from that of documentor. The minutiae of every moment is erased, indeed, rather than seeing the 'complete' picture (and is that a possibility anyway?) in Exhibit-on you see fragmentation, rather than documentation.

However, truths of the 'institution' and by that I mean the whole shee-bang of early childhood education, influences how we work, and these glaze over our personal gaze. It appears we sometimes wear glasses for different occasions. So to the work glasses. It is my notion that we put on other lenses when we work. We arrive at work one person, and pop on another pair of glasses to work in, taking them off when we go home. These lenses, specifically designed to work in, alter the reality before you. They create a boundary of gaze through which you see the way things are done. Early childhood has its own institutional boundaries, and it is through these boundaries that we, as the postmodernists say, police and govern children and their families. (McNamee, 2000; Cannella, 2001). Essentially this governing is the reinforcing of the way or the 'truths' of how young children should be educated and cared for. Simply put, as a society we won't allow young children under five to roam the streets, or participate in the paid workforce. But beyond the obvious, there is governance, often only visible when our ideas of early childhood are contrasted with other ideas from other cultures. Perhaps the tourist lens comes into play here, as the camera snaps images across the world. Why are fences around childcare centres in Australia, whereas in other countries there are not? Why does childcare equipment look a certain way? In other countries such equipment does not exist, and lo and behold children manage to grow themselves up learning whatever it was the equipment was going to teach them.

One serious point of unpacking gaze is to really look for the silences, for the hidden or the 'othered' within this governance. Or maybe just to always ask, WHY? Where does this idea come from? In altering our work glasses, or shifting the lens we may be able to ask these questions. As you all know from my previous work, these work images alter and shape our image of the child. The child we gaze at while at work, is different from the child we gaze upon at home. Central to all our work in unpacking the gaze is to unpack our gaze upon the child (Robertson 1999).

Is there a Reggio Gaze? Well, certainly. However, the educators who work in Reggio Emilia have their Reggio Gaze, as we in Australia have our Reggio Gaze. Although linked, they are not, and cannot be the same. The linking, or initial point of thought is what, it seems to me, that counts. This is the image of the child. This image is created from lenses, which filter our very understanding of children. Not created solely from 'at work' images, the image of the child is central. Is our Australian child the same as the one in Reggio, or America? No and yes. They are all the subject of gaze, and as subjects they have little power over how we interpret their actions and lives. It is the lens through which they are gazed, which in turn, creates what is 'seen'.

Is it possible to alter your gaze? Certainly my struggles with gaze are testament to the fact that it is possible, but there is no end point. I once heard of an experiment where researchers put glasses on people which made them see upside down, and apparently after two weeks, the participants' brains had made the change and they were seeing the right way up even though the lenses were still making it upside down. Oh dear, does this mean we will always revert to thinking we have at last found the answer, or to more comfortable ways of thinking? I don't want you to literally turn your world upside down, but the brain is an organ to be used, and such mental gymnastics come with the territory.

Brand name trendy glasses: In these glasses I gaze outwardly, in turn being gazed upon with approval as I wear my brand name trendy glasses, my Reggio glasses in fact. Basking in your approval and in my own savvy, these lenses give me kudos and a particular way of seeing which enables me to join a club. Clubs may inure us from seeing, or gazing, beyond the club 'rules'. This can be the DAP club, the gender club, the post-modern club, the Reggio club, the unpacking club, the IEC club, the SDN club, the KU club, the AECA club. Furthermore these club rules can be so attractive, such as the ateliers or furniture of Reggio Emilia, that we think we must have them to comply, or be in, the 'club'. All clubs have icons and rules, and we must be wary that we don't gaze only at the rules and icons, and forget to be provoked into thinking beyond them. We need to watch for "the establishment of middle class values and ways of seeing as a barometer by which everyone is evaluated." (Kincheloe 1997, p.viii) . I know that Alma will unpack this sentiment later, but I foreground it here in terms of lens and gaze.

Think about the gaze of the cinema, where events are interpreted by a producer, acted and filmed and then seen with subtitles in another country. In essence, this is what happens to us when we read or hear about Reggio Emilia. As we watch through our own Australian lenses, we naturally make interpretations. As we sat and listened to Shareen's paper, each of us had a tangle of values and thoughts weaving around her words and images, as you are doing to mine. Any Director worth his salt edits the work; it is foolhardy on our part to think we see the uncut versions of educational movies. We need to ask, what lens did they use, and what is still on the cutting room floor?

When the word 'Approach' was chosen for the title of the US book, 100 Languages, what other words were discarded? I've always felt the word Approach implies method, and find it jars, but is this a cross Pacific-Atlantic-Janet translation tangle? I know the Swedes had a twenty-year affair with the notion that Reggio Emilia was mainly about art and creativity from an original interpretation of the sub titles. So what interpretation of Reggio's cinematic sub titles are we making? I think taking it too literally, rather than thinking about the ideas. Unfortunately our gaze, inward and outward, upon Reggio is often dazzled by the gems which bejewel their outward apparition. However, there are possibilities for localizing thinking from afar, such as, as Hultqvist and Dahlberg say in the form of 'indigenous foreigners', international heroes such as John Dewey, Michel Foucalt, and Lev Vygotsky who are empty signifiers, homeless figures of thought that circulate freely in the global distributive apparatuses of research and education. When these figures are temporarily arrested in a local context, they take on the characteristic of that context before they move on to other contexts and become the target for further "interpretations and reinterpretations", (Hultqvist and Dahlberg 2001, p.9) They contest that the local input creates another idea. And this I think is the challenge for our gaze. Can we make the gaze upon Reggio Emilias' educational experiences, more than a mere replica?

Magnifying lens: With this lens we can see the minutiae of experiences. We can describe things and events with astonishing detail about that which is beneath the gaze. However, using only this lens, the wider picture can be lost. While looking closely at the text of a transcript of a conversation among three children, we can marvel at their theories and cleverness. However we risk forgetting that with every selection there are choices un-chosen (Dahlberg 1999). We must acknowledge the power inherent in the choice. Never forget, the choice of which bit of the transcript is thought to be important, and why, are choices and values cloaked in power. Foucalt's oft quoted phrase, "everything is dangerous" (MacNaughton 2000, p.241), is apt here. Remember, you can burn holes in paper with magnifying glasses.

So, as a practitioner, what lenses do I wear? I hope as many as possible. They also alter as we progress though an experience; lenses and gaze change with events, as children and I live our lives together. Often after the event I can put on my reflective lenses, and with the luxury of time and distance, think about what happened. Here are three stories about my life with children, which may un-muddle the muddle.

The Doll's playground

I will tell you the story of the dolls' playground. Following two girl's interests in thinking about what dolls would like in a playground, we sat and chatted. They produced ideas and drawings, which included swings, spa's and safety arrangements, as well as beautiful things to surround the playground. Investigation lens, One boy had been attracted to the doll swings we had put up, and swung his soft toy in them for 20 minutes. Change of lenses. I realized that I had only expected (not necessarily excluded) girls to be interested. Lens one. So I asked a group of boys what they thought might go in a doll's playground. This is their conversation.

Janet: "What would you need in a doll's playground?"
Chris "Sleeping bag"
Mitchell: "I don't know"
Chris "Cubby house"
Mitchell: "Swing"
Chris: "Bath"
Chris: "Work for the dolls"
Janet "What work would dolls do?"
Mitchell: "Anything"
Chris: (back to things) Sandpit, soft-fall'
Dougal: "Swing"
Mitchell "Boat"
Chris: "Fast boat"
Dougal: "Car"
Mitchell " Or a faster speeding boat"
Chris: "That's too fast, a rainbow sandpit, a digger"
Caitlin: "Doll's don't play with diggers"

Chris: "They can"
Caitlin: "Well mine won't"

I think we can call it the gendered gaze. In this small conversation, I can 'see' various constructs. Mitchell's bewilderment about the question, Chris accommodating his unfamiliarity with drawing playground equipment, to turn his drawing into a rainbow sandpit, and speaking straight from his desires, sticking up for his doll's right to play with diggers. Caitlin, unable to help herself, challenging Chris' notion of doll's play. And Mitchell finally finding a place for himself in this conversation and drawing endless very fast cars. Looking with gendered lenses, we all made constructs of what was suitable, argued for them, denied them, and made statements about what we think a boy or girl playground idea is like. All mind you, are valid. Being able to enter the dialogue about gender, its fairness, its unfairness and it opportunities is an essential part of a teacher's and child's gaze. This snapshot of gender constructions, taken from a much larger whole, can be viewed from multiple points. I am not fully immersed in the feminist post structuralist discourse; it shows in my teaching. However, the gaze of feminism, or of gender equity needs to be examined as we work within the challenges of Reggio Emilia. I like the differences between boys and girls, and often use these differences to highlight or enhance the ways children are thinking. This does not, however, allow me to condone without scrutiny, experiences or conventions which are shaping my gaze.

What's missing?

The next story is called: What's missing? Following a visit to the centre by a musician, at 7.30am, I showed the four early-bird children the photographs. I admit to having an agenda. I wanted to pop up a quick display in the foyer so families could see the event and the wondrous things children 'got' from it. If you like, I had the display lens on. After they had a good look, I asked Natalie to "tell me about it".

> *"James (the musician) has a, a, a, he has one of the those, they look like dragons". (Pointing to drum). "And there's Chris and me and Mitchell and Joyce and Alice and Kevin and Jess and Victoria and Patricia and Gemma and Rachel and Callum and Caitlin and Matthew and Kezia and Otto and Adela and Luke".*

I interrupt (still with my agenda) 'and what does the drum do?' Natalie, very polite, turns to me and says gently 'it shakes' and mimics the movement with her hand. Still not having listened to her, I ask, 'and what did you like best?' She burst into a smile and says, 'I'm thinking of the songs and singing along. And James has lots and lots of instruments, a drum and a guitar, shaker, tambourine, whistle and frog, two frogs that Tim and I used. Callum was using instruments, and James played his guitar'. I bask in this recall, thinking this is more like it, I'll be able to make a great display in the foyer to show the parents how clever their children are.

I push the photos towards Tim, who looks briefly at them, then crosses his arms and looks cranky. I move the photos to Chris, who immediately says, 'There is me, and Mitchell was sitting behind me, and you Natalie and Jonathan and Mitch next to you and Rachel is next to me. He (James) has all these instruments. I like the guitar the best - 'cause I have it at home".

Mitch leans over, 'look at the red eyes' and all three laugh. Tim still sits back in his chair looking cross. Then Mitch says, "I'm there, and so are you Chris, there is Oliver and Gemma and look my brother Callum." He scans the group at the table, returns to the photos and says, "there's you Natalie and you Tim", Tim drops his arms and says 'where Tim?' craning his head forward. It is at the moment I start to refocus my lens. Mitch points to Tim's photo and Tim stabs his picture "Tim!" and then recounts those sitting about him, ' Callum, Victoria and Kezia'. I begin to understand. Tim's reaction to the presence of his image interrupts my agenda. Was his supposed exclusion from the shots so personally distressing he could not participate in a simple discussion?

In a flash, rather like a small movie, I recalled all those other times I have sat with children with photos and patiently sat through the 'this is me, that's you, where are you' comments waiting for the real thinking to emerge and just letting them pass through this stage. As I re-viewed this 'movie' I realized what I had thought was a preface, was in fact central to the entire 'movie'. Children's presence. Their notion of group, of needing not only to be present in the photos, but also to recall who else was there and in what position, was central to their even beginning to think about the instruments. When Mitch scanned the group at the table, then found them in the photo he affirmed their joint, virtual and real presence. As I was in mid-thought, Chris lent over and said 'there is me' pointing to a fragment of yellow jumper. Mitch and Natalie leaned over and nodded. In a swift change of focus, I laughingly said, 'well where is your head?' Chris gaily stabbed a point above the photo and said 'there!' I pretended to look puzzled and he launched into a long explanation of why his head was not there, as the camera had cut it off, ending with ' but I was there yeah'. Out of the mouths of babes. He had spoken the lens word .. while metaphorically and physically I had decapitated him.

At last abandoning the notion of a foyer display about musical instruments, I suggested he might like to draw his head. He was out of his chair so fast he nearly fell over, collecting pen and paper he settled down to a difficult task. Drawing is not really Chris' genre, he 's more a builder and talker, so it was difficult. While measuring and thinking he noted Rachel and Anne were missing heads as well.

His engagement with replacing what was missing attracted others, Mitch tackled himself, Gemma completed Jono's body and legs and Mitchell drew his entire self and placed it behind Chris's chair. As you can see, every notion of drawing was 'disturbed' by the need to replace what is missing. Their usual schema for drawing was interrupted and the problem of how to draw seated people strained drawing skills, requiring discussions about how to do it between all four. Intimate sharing, even drawing on each other's paper eventuated in these drawings. I certainly had my lens focused on the possibilities for negotiation, problem solving at that moment. I'm pleased to note I have managed to dispose of my 'art and craft' lens, and used my 'visible thinking' lenses instead to assist me in my gaze upon their drawing. However, at the end of the table Phoebe had been beavering away on a drawing and she patiently waited till I had time to cut it out. Not actually dismissing her work, but leaving it on the back burner, I casually asked her who it was. This dismissive nature arose because she had drawn an entire person and by now I was immersed or focussed on body parts. She picked up the photo without the musician, and said 'it's James, it goes here', and placed it in the appropriate position aligned to the audience. Oh dear. Wide lenses required.

Now I require the lens of enquiry. Why did Tim feel so put out when he at first did not see himself in the group? Is it that he is so much a member of the group that he can't participate in the group when he is absent, does he see himself first and then the group? Is Natalie's inclusion of everyone, and Chris's inclusion of missing body parts a symbol of their group-ness? Can I surmise that by living together all these years they feel as one, and need to identify the pack before they move on. Or is it that they appreciate each other's involvement in the lives they lead with us, that it is themselves they note when they note others? Can we track important friendships and significant others by their being mentioned within such a litany? More and more as I think about this, the more I realize I needed a lens of relationships. Of relationships way beyond the DAP notion of 'social and emotional', a relationship lens which places all of us living at school within its focus. The relationship with boy and girl, with present and absent, a lens of – in the Italian, 'Io chi siamo': 'I am who we are', or 'we are who I am' .

Beyond the lens of relationships between people, I need a lens of relationships about materials. As Vea Vecchi says, 'all materials have their own ABC's'. Drawing suited the photographs, and the ABC's of drawing provided the children with built in problems. I did not need to invent difficulties for the children, they emerged as the children tried to fit the missing pieces into the proportions of the photo, challenging the comfortable schema they have for representing people, as it were being the pea in the princesses bed.

Each child's solution to the problems of representation illuminate who they are and how they are shaped by those around them. As Mitch wrestled with how to replicate his shirt, he had forgotten he was to draw what was missing, not what existed. Gemma remonstrated with him, pointing out that his shirt would obscure Jono's face, placing the paper shirt on the photograph to make the point. "Oh" said Mitch, then sat back perplexed. Then made as if to leave. Gemma leaned across and pointed to the base of the shirt in the photograph, and said, "you need a bottom, then legs". Mitch, who was then prepared to continue, accepted Gemma's gift. His need for accuracy was evident when he asked if any one could see his shoes in the other photos as he needed to draw them and could not remember what he was wearing that day. The two of them poured over the shots hunting for the evidence, chatting about shoes. Gemma and Mitch make unlikely colleagues; it is an accident of timing that they have been together each day at this time of the morning. However, it seems that the lure of the missing parts made for this unusual intellectual alliance between disparate ages and natures.

George Forman notes that a particular lens is required when using photos with children. He maintains that photographs can be merely a record of what happened, or a jumping off point in which the reader engages with the idea within the photograph, and then takes it further. A sort of window to other possibilities. This notion of child as reader of images, empowers the child to be an active receptor of text or image (Fuery and Mansfield, 1997). This no longer passive reader requires we acknowledge the power of what is known as a writerly text or image, one "in which the text is actively constructed by the reader" (p. 207). This presupposes that the photograph itself was taken with that intention in mind. So a pre-photograph lens is required; no longer are photographs happy snaps to show parents, but are illustrations of our gaze.

As Gunilla Dahlberg (1999) says, there must be an ethics of encounter when engaging in relationships. And indeed there is a "choice, a choice among choices, a choice in which pedagogues themselves are participating. Like wise that which we do not choose is also a choice" (p. 33). Was I in danger of seeking the 'Reggio investigation', and missing a profound moment and insight into the inclusion of children here? It is possible that the 'Reggio moment' can obscure other moments. This ethics of an encounter troubles and delights me. Always as we pursue a path, we choose not to select other paths. My delight is that those other paths I still glimpse as I pass them; my worry is that I don't want an orthodoxy to dictate the paths I choose. The lenses which say, this is what you are looking for and this is how you will find it, are very seductive. Orthodoxy is so easy.

Circles

Next I will tell a story called circles. The toddlers had been able to make a standing ring or circle all year. The process seemed to fascinate them. They hold hands and arrange each other within the circle, giggle, swing arms and smile at each other across the space in the middle. This passion for circles has intrigued me. What is it? I decided to put their desire to the test. Usually an adult participated in making the circle, sorting out all the odds and ends once the children had partially assembled the circle. This time I asked the group if they could make a circle on their own. My role as photographer seemed to help the children realise I was not in a position to help them.

From their starting positions, the children quite easily joined hands, in much the same order that they had been sitting. Very young children such as Preemet, Jordan and Rachel acceded to the 'power' of the group, just standing and having their hands held by more experienced circle makers. Ryan, seemingly excited by the emerging shape, galloped around the edge for a while, initially missing out on finding a gap and joining hands. However, he was drawn to one edge of the circle and held Rachel's hand. Movement now ceased; they appeared satisfied with the shape. Simon shot through the younger children's complacency by announcing, "It's only a half circle".

Corey, assessing the situation, seemed to realise that Ryan's position presented the problem. I'm not sure whether he thought by moving himself he could bridge the gap between the edges, or whether he intended to drag the circle around towards Lara, who was on the other edge. Melisa, realising that if Ryan moved towards Lara the gap would close, left her place and took Ryan's arm and pulled him over to Lara. Unfortunately Ryan let go of Rachel's hand, thereby making another gap. At this point Preemet, on her sixth day with us, let go both hands and stood off centre, her hands occupied by the bag. Corey and Mel unaware of the breeches in the shape, returned to their places. Simon moved around to hold Jordan's' hand, stopping that gap. Corey left his place once more, and remonstrated with Preemet, 'hold hands, no bag, hold hands'. Preemet with little English considered this for a moment. Corey returned to Ryan, held his hand firmly and dragged the circle around towards Preemet. Mel and Lachlan quickly held hands bridging the gap left by Corey. Then the master stroke. Corey reached down and held the strap of Preemet's bag, she took one look, turned sideways and held Rachel's hand with her left. The circle was complete.

It took 7 minutes for the eleven children to achieve the circle. Those children who remained in place were seminal in the process. By maintaining the shape they allowed Corey, Mel and Preemet to make the appropriate corrections. To create the circle each individual had to suppress their other desires: such as to run, walk away or dance. If all the children had left their places the problem would have been multiplied tenfold. Corey's and Mel's obvious leadership, Simons complacency puncture, Preemet's courage in allowing Corey to touch her precious talisman from home, in Corey's empathy in knowing the bag was precious and his tenderness in allowing her to still keep it, and Ryan's ceasing to gallop were integral to the circle eventually being formed. It seems that the skills each child brought to the group, were utilized by the group, and thus the circle was not only a 'joint enterprise but represented joint expertise' (New 1994).

I have repeated this request several times over the years, and it is always different, and the same, with children achieving the standing ring as a joint enterprise utilizing joint expertise. Last year, the group accommodated with great tolerance a child whose contribution to the circle making was to always sit in the center of the emerging shape. Her desire was to be in the prime position for first go at the game once the circle was complete. Her action of remaining seated, (a rather brave resolve as the embryonic circle swayed and gyrated around her), gave the rest of the group a focus around which to circle. One could take the position that she was being self serving. However, at times during the formation of the ring, the intentions of the others faltered, and she would burst into song giving a lusty rendition of her favorite game, 'Sandy Girl'. Given this audible prompt, the others would once again re-grasp hands and attempt the ring again. Lured by the sound of singing, Joshua, a child with Downs Syndrome, appeared at the door just as the group managed to encircle Phoebe. Josh's preferred mode of communication at the time was signing, so when Alice turned her head and saw Josh at the door she dropped her hand from the circle and signed 'come', calling his name. He moved towards the group, who all remained still, Alice organized for Josh to hold hands on his left, then grasping his right she completed the ring again and they began to play , you guessed it, 'Sandy girl'. Such inclusion and competence on the part of Josh, Alice, Phoebe and the group once more affirmed for me that membership of the group is central to life, for all the group. The lens or gaze upon Phoebe could have been censorious by the group, but with amicable tolerance it accepted Phoebe's need to be where she was, in return for her singing prompts. At one time I would have felt saddened by Phoebe's presumption she would be first, but in taking my cue from the group, I watched and accepted, and then realised how well they know her. As a postscript to this circle work, when Alice saw the photographs accompanying their achievement that day, she became engrossed in the shot of her signing to Josh to 'come'. Serendipity, or poor shutter work, meant the lens had captured her hand up in a 'stop' sign, rather then down in the beckoning movement. Silent for a long time, she turned to me and said, "No it Josh come, not stop, see" and pointed to the next photo in the sequence, of Alice clasping her hand to Josh's. To further embellish her recasting of the true events, she drew the circle of children with Josh holding her hand.

My gaze was of individuals and group, of the idea that a group consists of an individual within the group, not a group of individuals. Necessarily, it is a gaze, which believes and celebrates that a group is central to life, not a necessity. It was also a gaze which presumes children are capable, both as group members and as a group.

Conclusion

These simple stories are redolent with personal gaze, and are totally subjective, as I am unable to extract my thinking from these events. I chose these simple stories as they illustrate clearly my involvement in gaze and lenses, rather than perhaps more 'sexy' and complex Reggio type experiences with children, to illustrate the influence of gaze upon teaching

I had many more lenses to play with. Goggles you spit on to keep them fog free, safety glasses for Foucalt's 'everything is dangerous' , kaleidoscopes to return my gaze back to me in rearranged pieces, the kiddy glasses for the perpetually happy child engaged in worthwhile experiences without a sad or dark thought in their soul, the nice lady glasses for the teacher who never asks the difficult or awful questions, such as 'if someone is not your friend, what are they?', during bucolic discussions about 'what is a friend?' . Or binoculars both forward and backwards, telescopes, contact lenses, can you kiss with glasses on ... the list was long. However, you will be relieved to know the metaphor can only be strung out so far.

The gaze is plural, subjective and powerful, especially when turned on children. Like night vision goggles, it can give the illusion of seeing in the dark and of omnipotence. In the ethics of encounters, we are beholden to be 'tentative and exploratory' (Dahlberg 1999) in our gaze and subsequent use of it. We must also be rigorous in our examination of the past, present and future gaze. May the gaze be with you.

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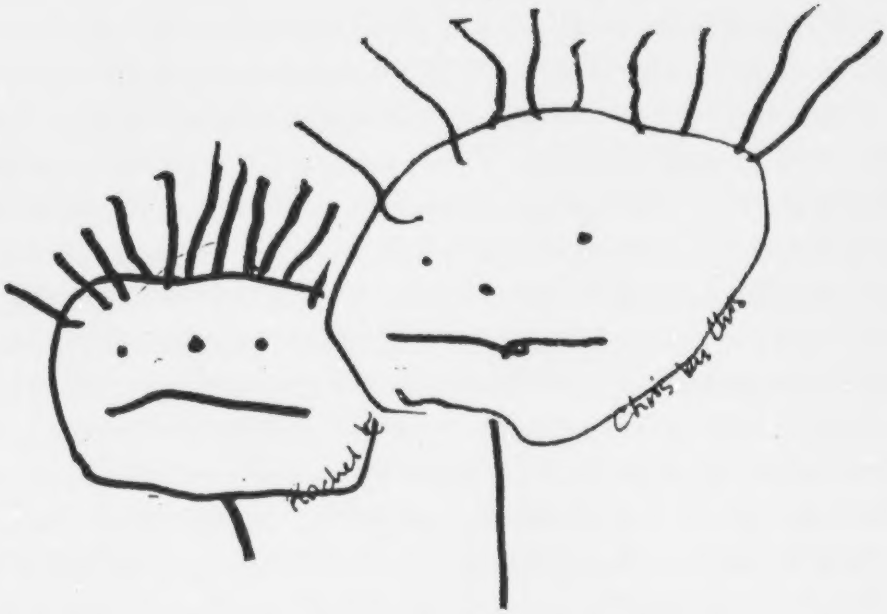
Diversity silenced

Alma Fleet


Rachel
Chris

Diversity silenced

Alma Fleet

This paper is a response to both a niggling concern and a defensiveness. As you know, this symposium was originally planned to coincide with the visit to Sydney of *The 100 Languages of Children* Exhibition. The program was conceived to engage with the challenge of that particular exhibition. Now we find ourselves in the situation where we'll all need to go to Melbourne or Perth to see that exhibition, but we're also in the unique position of being able to celebrate the first Australian provocation for unpacking interpretation- what Janet Robertson originally called an "Exhibit-on" rather than an exhibition. So, as we move on from that previous situation; the discussion moves on as well.

Nevertheless, concerns from the original provocation are still worth raising. We were anxious that the excellence associated with the ideas emerging from Reggio Emilia might be dismissed, firstly perhaps as an Italian aesthetic, with its own socio cultural contexts which we could self-righteously ignore as being 'Other', from somewhere else. Secondly, however, and perhaps more profoundly problematic, the ways of working inspired by these particular Italians might possibly be construed as elitist, and almost certainly as Anglo middle class.

My discomfort in giving this paper is almost as strong as my discomfort about not having the topic discussed, but not quite, which is why I'm up here struggling with it today. The title continues to evade me- but may become clearer by the end, in the way that often happens with writing: what is trying to unfold only becomes clear in the unfolding of it. That being the case, I'll just need to talk you through it as I think it through, rather than presenting the finished product as if I'd always known where I was going. An early draft of the program simply assigns me the topic of "Diversity", because we knew it had to be here, but where to go from there?

I played with the notion of "Diversity - silenced and celebrated". I still quite like it for a number of reasons. The original concern has to do with the silencing - the invisibility of diverse cultures or handicapping conditions, perhaps even of varying lifestyles or life circumstances which is apparent when we try to discuss the inspirations from Reggio Emilia. To some extent this has to do with visual stereotyping. Certainly the children we see in the material from Italy, look "Italian", in some happy healthy Middle European sense. From the perspective of geographical origins, we actually know nothing about where they or their parents are born, although we know that this is a settled town which has only recently been affected by migration, so that in fact we are probably genuinely seeing Reggiani. We do not, however, see children who look Asian or Arabic (for example), and we might wonder if their lives might be included or represented in the ways that are being offered to us by the Italians. Interestingly, during a study tour in 1996, Carlina Rinaldi, the major spokesperson for this pedagogical community after the death of Loris Malaguzzi, mused with us about the possible impact of migration on the small Reggio community. Increasingly, migrants were coming from North Africa and elsewhere to try to establish themselves in this wealthy industrial and agricultural region. Having visited Melbourne in 1993, the Senior *pedagogiste* from Reggio Emilia knew that we had a more visibly diverse society than they, and wondered if we might help them with their journey, as they were helping us with ours. Perhaps Carlina was thinking in terms of inclusivity, perhaps of enhancing the diversity through its valuing. Certainly this was the perspective in one piece of *documentazzione* which we saw in a centre in Reggio Emilia, in which there had been an investigation of skin colour - of what children thought it meant to be "black" or "white", and the relationship to the colour of your blood or your heart or your soul.

To some extent, the unease associated with diversity in our case also has to do with the presentation of material for celebration- that is, the selecting of illustrations for a book, or the mounting of work for an exhibition. Such decisions are made with care and presented respectfully, neatly, lovingly framed and honoured in presentation. Is the result of such presentation therefore open to claims of elitism? Can the claim be made that low income families or centres with limited finances cannot relate to the work if it is presented in a manicured and shining state? Or rather, can the reverse be argued. Can it be said that all children's work deserves the respectful presentation that we see in our Exhibit-on or indeed in the *100 Languages*? This situation might be much as one might visualise in a family, with the contrast between Saturday afternoon play clothes and *dishabille,* and

Saturday night going out gear, or Sunday morning finery put on for church or visiting the Grandparents- when attire is chosen to be tidy and dressed up to show respect.

This discussion gets tied up with the arguments raised a few years ago by Richard Johnson, an American who was critiquing the cargo cult mentality of people who unquestioningly adopted ideas from Reggio Emilia. As is the way with people who are making a strong point, he offended many people by seeming to be dismissive of anything related to Reggio Emilia, without having visited the city or engaged in the ideas himself. His work was very useful, however, in confronting the faddism of Americans who had the werewithall to spend their $5000 to go worship at the feet of the Reggio lions in the Emilian piazza, or to mimic that experience by buying a light table and imagining a world of beauty and light. While he has since admitted to using material from Reggio Emilia in his own graduate teaching and exploring the ideas more calmly as part of the current international currency in ideas (2000), his effrontery nevertheless disturbed many of us. Was there some kind of beautiful almost Renaissance bubble that was being pricked by this arrogant academic from Hawaii? Or in fact, was he waving a flag of warning about the unproblematic copying of anything exotic as being better because it was from "over the fence"?

We are a little saved here from the force of Johnson's onslaught, because as a nation- Australians are very sceptical. This is a useful frame of reference to avoid cargo cult worship. Many of us have been vocal from the beginning of our Italian experience to insist that we all listen to what Carlina Rinaldi was saying: to not be seduced by the magnetism of an undeniable power, both of culture and of children's breathtaking achievements, but to look to our own situations, to find "our Reggio", to perhaps take the gift of the philosophies and approaches that they were using to enhance and springboard our own work.

Nevertheless, we are grateful to Johnson and other critics for waving warning flags. Similarly, Margaret Clyde (1994) cautioned us when the exhibition previously visited Australia and there was an accompanying conference in Melbourne, and annually, Janet Robertson challenges us to find our own Reggio. This series of conferences, in fact, was conceptualised to deal with the challenge of finding our Australian context for the extraordinarily powerful accomplishments of one Italian community.

Returning to the original quandry of the title – we have wandered briefly around the perception of elitism – what about celebrating diversity? Other than the slippery sounds and the symmetry of the words "silencing and celebrating", what else is lurking in the vocabulary? To me, the word "celebrating" has had a brief but rich life in the Australian educational lexicon. It's a word that has brought energy and vibrancy to some of the otherwise dull and mechanical aspects of curriculum. Celebrating diversity is a much more positive slogan than struggling with the perceived challenges of "multiculturalism" and less narrow than work associated with children and adults who were described as having "special needs". Nevertheless, it has begun to have a rather hollow ring. We are handicapped by our dependence on a limited vocabulary.

When words take on more responsibility than their previous existence might have prepared them for, they often become shallow and tokenistic. This seems to be happening to "celebrating". When we talk about celebrating diversity in schools and other childhood sites, we often find what's called a "multicultural dance day" or a cooking fest, the kind of tourist curriculum which has been unpacked by Creaser and Dow (1996). Certainly it's lovely to have an Indian mother come in to make curry puffs with the children or a Malaysian Dad come in to impress with satay. However, such events can have a particularly isolating message if they are part of a one off stall at the fete, or the guest visit that gets ticked off as having attended to the recognition of diverse cultures in the community. On the other hand, if one of the children's relatives cooks every other Friday, there is a valuing of family and an integral and automatic inclusion of diversity. If each family cooks something from one of its favourite meals, many stereotypes will be challenged. At the basic level for example, the Anglo-Australian auntie may make the satay, while the Indian looking (second-generation Australian) dad may bake the lamingtons.

We have to make do with the word celebrating for what we do at birthday parties and New Year's Eve and so on, but it is only a placeholder of some kind when we talk about the construct of diversity. Part of the challenge is that there are so many things to be included in the diversity party: differences in race; in languages and cultures; lifestyles and beliefs; physical and mental conditions, characteristics, gender and abilities; personalities and inclinations; geography and economic circumstance. There certainly is a need to move beyond a multicultural curriculum to the broader conception of an anti-bias curriculum, if only to extend awareness beyond highlighting regional versions of culture to other aspects of difference and societal inequity. It is interesting that, to some extent, "multiculturalists" in the United States are seen to be engaged in transforming or redistributing cultural capital (Olneck, 2000). In Australia, we seem to have left the debate at the level of recognising and accepting stereotypical cultural characteristics associated with food, clothing or holidays, without reshaping the discourse to recognise the complexities of the cultures of each home and work place. The levels of complexity must be extended into the fabric of our policies and practices, and become a consideration in every day decision-making as well as becoming embedded in underlying philosophies.

How do we get such diversity into any conversation? How do we get it into this site for considering the unpacking of interpretation in our work with young children, their families and each other? I wondered briefly about physically including different people in this presentation to represent the reality of diversity. I even started a contact list, but rather quickly came to a halt. Who do I approach to stand up here with me to talk with you about their perspective on these ways of working? In an attempt to give voice to those who are silenced, who do I ask to speak: an Aboriginal staff member? a male early childhood teacher? a single mother living in low income housing? a gay children's services worker? A Korean parent? A hard of hearing student teacher? Children or adults who have been born outside Australia? Well, I'm one of them - does that make me a useful representative of diversity?

My list became a nonsense, and introduced more pitfalls of tokenism. And in any case, would I find someone who is normally outside of such professional discourse who would be comfortable standing in a University lecture theatre and saying anything at all? The venue and occasion are distancing in themselves. So where does that leave us?

I continued to worry about how to say things that needed to be said. The diversity literature is only marginally helpful, because it isn't dealing with the context I'm considering, which is precisely the challenge we're all giving ourselves - to take the ideas which are being shared here and try to rethink them in our own contexts. Rebecca New, however, may give us a starting point. Many of you know that she writes widely and thoughtfully about these and related issues. New (2000) recently wrote about "several principles which might well support more effective and equitable processes for determining what adults hope and plan for young children in the United States" (p8). Her list included the goal to "foster diversity in quality and respect the quality in diversity". I think this moves us beyond celebration. It gives us permission to define excellence through multiple perspectives and situations and to value different people, their experience, and ways of being.

How does this help us move beyond wherever we started?

Hopefully, it enables us to look with rather different eyes. I've said before that we are lucky here in that we don't have to seek diversity - it surrounds and includes us. Not only do we have a keynote and workshops in this Symposium which enable us to focus particularly on what a variety of people are doing and thinking and questioning, but we have a Provocation in our lounge which extends our experience. The photographs and names remind us that our staff and children look different from each other and come from a range of backgrounds. The settings are diverse - including the suburban sites, city day care, private schools and council services. Now, is this just the visual stereotyping that I mentioned in my opening remarks? I don't think so. I think that what we are seeing here is an integrity of pedagogy. We are seeing a way of working which has been robustly supported by the Italian experience but firmly grounded in the Australian soil. We are looking at work which makes visible the fundamental humanity and uniqueness of each encounter, shared through a professional presentation.

Let me share a few examples from work which has only just been completed and which is not visible in this Exhibit-on.

Firstly, let's think about content of investigations. There are two aspects here which I would like to emphasise. Firstly, there is the selection of content that invites engagement and thereby overcomes marginalisation. Engaging content might be seen as that which enables a range of children to become involved in genuinely interesting, personally relevant opportunities. One student teacher described a situation in which:

> *Some of the children also did not enjoy participating in social/group activities (may have been a result of their language difficulties/ frustrations). These children were often overlooked by teachers and peers. Implementing a child-initiated project which had an active social group focus could develop and extend the children's verbal and non-verbal language, participation in social learning situations, sharing and negotiation skills, team work, collaboration, cooperation, self esteem, confidence, self help skills, and primarily the co-construction of knowledge.*(Pavia, p2)

This potential was clearly seen when another student teacher, Michelle, built on the children's enthusiasm for cake building in her three year olds' sand pit. Her observation of their consistent fascination provided an opportunity to include one child who had not been settling at the centre and another whose limited English had caused him to hang back from daily activities, until the cake baking became so irresistible that he joined in the play. Insight is not often credited with preventing marginalisation of children, but in this case, a philosophy of inclusion was grounded in an awareness of children's interests and perspective. Michelle was rewarded with a photo from home of the previously reluctant child happily baking a cake, and the same child enthusiastically racing into the centre by the end of her practicum period.

To emphasise the importance of the point being made here, I would like to briefly draw your attention to an article by Tabors (1998) in *Young Children*. In discussing effective programs for linguistically and culturally diverse children and families, Tabors notes a range of important strategies for teachers. She writes that "social isolation and linguistic constraints are frequently a feature of second-language learner's early experience in a setting where their home language is not available to them" (p 24), and suggests forms of classroom organisational and linguistic patterning to assist. She misses, however, the point which is being made here, that the choice of content and observational strategies used by the teacher can, in fact, create an engaging context which invites the second-language learner into inclusive encounters based on peer-mediated social interaction. Both the supportive environment and the magnetism of cake-baking as curriculum enabled two previously marginalised children to become integrated into the life of this centre and gain access to the social construction of knowledge inherent in that context. In this specific forum of the consideration of the unpacking of interpretation, the process of documenting the encounters has provided Michelle with a springboard for her planning which enabled an entrée point for two families and rich growth experiences for their children.

Secondly, there is the matter of confronting less common or less comfortable topics and building on children's natural curiosity rather than silencing it. Let's consider a standard topic - the senses. In this case, Lucy, a student teacher captured a conversation which unfolded in a Year two class. She then reported in her interpretation that:

> *This conversation shows that the girls are intrigued with the components of the ear. They possibly did not know that there are so many parts. After this conversation occurred, Lisa came and approached me, posing her question. The girls were intrigued with the meaning behind why I wore hearing aids.*
> *Were they interested because they had not met anyone with hearing aids before?*
> *Did they understand how sound travels through to be received by the brain?*

She brought in a large ear replica from the Macquarie library for them to explore, and for her to find out what the girls understood about hearing.

> *Posing the question back to the three girls, they replied:*
> *Zoe: "sounds go into this part and travels through the tube. Then the sound goes into the brain."*
> *Bianca: "but when I have a blocked ear, I can't hear properly!"*
> *Zoe: "yeah, you have to go to the doctor and (s)he looks inside it with that torch"*
> *Bianca: "then you get eardrops that make the blocked part go away"*
> *Zoe: "Ms Bradstreet, is your hearing like a blocked ear?"*

> *Were Bianca, Zoe and Lisa socially constructing knowledge of myself as a hearing impaired person in their classroom?*

Lucy then went on to explain that she had a hearing loss because she was born early and her hearing didn't develop. The girls had the opportunity for scientific learning, for empathy, for genuine engagement with a meaningful topic. Ally wanted to know how Lucy could learn to talk, if she couldn't hear. Lisa asked, "As you grow and your ears get bigger, do you have to get new hearing aids?" Lucy's interpretation continued:

> The girls displayed curiosity as they unfolded very interesting questioning. The students' level of thinking displayed areas of new knowledge unfolding as they were posing further hypothesis to be investigated. Their understanding of why people have to wear hearing aids or to use sign language became the focus of conversation…(Bradstreet, 2001)

and so on; an opportunity to engage with diversity in an authentic and richly human way. These discussions led to further encounters with books, computer searches and narrative writing.

Adults who have not had the opportunity to specialise in early childhood studies often have difficulties reconciling these stories of learning with mandated curriculum requirements. One benefit of the sharing of a Symposium such as this is the opportunity to engage in dialogue (a more substantive encounter than "just talking") about these concerns. In the context of the current example, it is worth pausing to refer to Lambert's (2000) recent paper on problem-solving in the first years of school. This author constructs the argument in terms of curriculum opportunities - such as Lucy's hearing aids - being seen as opportunities for inter-domainal problem-solving. Because of the integration of a number of cognitive processes and decision-making frameworks, problem-solving is highly regarded as a goal of schooling. When the problems are pre-determined with closed narrow outcomes, they are, however, so distinct from life encounters that the problem is a little p word rather than a conceptually engaging challenge.

So, have I strayed too far from diversity? No. The diversity inherent in any group of learners – whether they be you the audience, or a class of young children – that diversity requires as much advocacy for admission to the mainstream policy agenda as do all the other differences implied by the diversity debates.

There's more that needs to be said too about diversity of presentation as well as the capturing of diversity, but time does not permit an exploration of this aspect of the topic. Suffice it to say that presentation not only reflects respect for children, but acts as an advocacy tool in inviting others to read the work explained within, and come to gain more understanding of the richness of children's ideas. Work that always looks institutional leaves little room for children's or teacher's voices. In terms of advocacy, we need to be more forceful in defending the diversity of expression and presentation with our parent communities. Many parents are misled by worksheet driven instruction which appears focussed and purposeful, but may in fact be silencing many kinds of diversity- including learning styles and individuality of conceptualisation.

Then we need to consider who is actually involved, the diversity of participants in these narratives of encounter. On the one hand, the people are automatically diverse because each of us is an individual, as well as because of our regional demographic – but the existence of variety does not guarantee valuing of family traditions or individual perspectives .

Let's consider one more piece of pedagogical documentation which shows the power of perceptive observation and interpretation. Mitzy begins by describing interactions with children who are playing outside, and have stopped to compare their watches. As a thoughtful practitioner, Mitzy listens to the one English speaker in the group and pauses to wonder what it is about the encounter which has intrigued children, the dinosaur image on the watch face? Telling the time? or the *watches* themselves. This is a very big piece of work, and as with the pieces in the Exhibit-on, we can share only a glimpse of the experiences, the wondering, the hypothesising, the multiple forms of investigation. After discussion with her colleagues, an important ingredient, she decides to follow up the interest in watches. She then describes a key segment for us.

> *Henley was drawing a watch and its features. Since he spoke only key words in English, I asked him to draw what he saw in the watch or clock. He took about seven minutes as he drew as much detail as possible, and when I saw some scribbles on the side, I asked him, what was that, and his answer was 'sun'. I paused and reflected on what he had said and asked him again. This time he said 'sun' and pointed to the window. I got down next to him as I was sitting in front of him and looked at the clock (that looked like a watch). There was a reflection of sun that came through the window, and Henley had drawn it. (Martinez, 2001)*

Mitzy goes on to say that when Henley seemed to feel that he was not being understood, he would go to the writing area and record what he wished to convey; certainly his meaning is clear here. Later,

> *To follow Henley's interest to find out what was at the back of the watch, we opened a watch and the children had a chance to explore what was inside it. Henley looked at it first and waited until the others had finished with it. He explored different parts of the watch and tried to take it apart but he could not do it. He was able to take the battery out and to fit one of his fingers through the side and move the hands of the watch. He repeated this action a few times and played with the watch for a long period of time without saying a word... he continued playing with the watches [and was joined by Frank, another child in the class] Henley then moved to the writing centre and Frank followed him. They were drawing circles when Henley took a watch out of his pocket, opened it and left it on the table. Henley and Frank drew different watches, but Henley concentrated on the watch that was opened. He drew every single detail of the watch on two different papers. When he had finished, he gave me one drawing and said 'folder', then pointed to the other drawing and said 'home'.* (Martinez, 2001)

This piece of documentation is unusual in that it includes the watch and battery as well as Henley's drawing to enable us to appreciate the attention to detail in his work. As one of the other protagonists only came to the centre once a week, Mitzy repeated several of the experiences to enable him to participate. Daniel was similarly intrigued with the opening and functioning of the watch. This respecting of different patterns of attendance enabled richer opportunities for the social construction of knowledge. The children's fascinations inevitably led to clock making, which was assisted by Henley's attention to detail. Meanwhile, other children explored the topic in other ways. Mitzy was able to extend Mary-Michelle's conversation in Spanish, mediating the experience for the non-Spanish speaker involved in the discussion. This work was displayed for families; the original work includes pictures of many people gathered around, including Henley, who brought his grandfather to share in the experience. The power of such opportunities is undeniable.

This piece highlights the issue of visual diversity within environments, as do the photo posters which reflect the range of faces in the wider community, the newspapers on the paint table with Cyrillic or Arabic scripts as well as the Sydney Morning Herald or Daily Telegraph, the fabric drapes from a range of cultures being used to soften harsh corners. These issues are broader than can be canvassed here, although they are reflected elsewhere (Fleet and Robertson, 1998). Suffice it to say that the messages of the environment must not be undervalued. They are a potent reflection of what staff and employers value. Note Tarr's (2001) recent comment on the early childhood environments in Reggio Emilia as they contrast with most kindergarten programs for four and five year olds in America and Canada:

> *These two spaces reflect distinct cultural values for children: the typical North American classroom reflects notions of preparation for the future world of work, of an environment that isolates particular aspects of a culture, that simplifies visual forms, and protects children from the outside world. Its visual aesthetic reflects mass marketing and craft-store culture. It does not challenge children aesthetically to respond deeply to the natural world, their cultural heritage, or to their inner world.* (Tarr, 2001, p38)

This brings us to the story of the toy box as a site for valuing of personal uniqueness in teacher education. Apart from assignments with children, how do we help student teachers deeply understand the philosophies underlying the practices we foreground? As staff interested in promoting the possibilities of documentation for novice teachers, we were searching for an entrance point, an opportunity to share with our student teachers the processes and potential of recording an investigation through analytical eyes, something which accommodated different learning styles and points of view. We needed a provocation that had authenticity in the context in which we were teaching and which could resonate for the group. As is often the way, a difficult situation provided the unexpected possibility.

A provocation for a toy box investigation

> *Memories lodge in places that are distinct. Axes, orchards, platforms, boundaries, openings, canopies, and markers, when interwoven with our movements through them and the light that plays across them, set out an intricate web of relationships that can ensnare moments from our lives and keep them in safekeeping.* (Lyndon and Moore, 1994).

We had been assigned an uninspiring teaching space, a traditional, rather dark tiered lecture theatre. Catherine Patterson and I visited it before classes began in order to visualise the experience for students. As the unit we were teaching included issues related to effective and aesthetic environments, we felt that this unprepossessing space was rather counter-productive. We decided to create a new aesthetic by draping the lectern and chalkboards with cream-coloured airy cloths and by adding interesting or attractive objects to counter the expected ambience.

The first week's result was striking, with an Arabian coffee pot and large brass tray countering the usual lecture theatre sombreness. For the second week, George Lewis offered to bring in the old toy chest which he kept in his office as a reminder of earlier family times. We had to carry the heavy antique a considerable distance between buildings and were unsure of the value of our efforts. After the lecture, Kim, one of the class members, offered to help us carry back our collections of books, papers and the toy chest. She and George began to talk about the history of toy boxes in their respective families. As we were carrying the load back past bemused University students, George told how he had painted this sea chest which his father had brought back from India and

Kim began to reminisce about the toy box she had acquired from her brother overseas. Our investigation began to take shape.

As I began to tell about my two chests, the possibilities of exploring the rich links with families and with personal memories became even more enticing. I also had my father's old Navy chest at home, lovingly painted by my parents and decorated with the decals of the day. It had made several trips around the world and was now relegated to safe-keeping on a high shelf in a store-room, no longer practical but too rich with memories to discard.

When does a toy box become a treasure chest?

> *The casket contains the things that are unforgettable, unforgettable for us, but also unforgettable for those who we are going to give our treasures. Here the past, present and a future are condensed. Thus the casket is memory of what is immemorial…Sometimes a lovingly fashioned casket has interior perspectives that change constantly as a result of a daydream. We open it and discover that it is a dwelling place, that a house is hidden in it.* (Bachelard, 1994)

The other chest- a camphor wood chest – had been a storage place for a doll collection that had never been played with, a tribute to gifts from a travelling aunt who had sent the dolls with thoughts of the little girl she'd never had herself. Images of dreams and memories cascaded thought the stories we were telling each other. We then talked about how we might share this emerging investigation with the other students, remembering we were in a climate of assessment and limited time, where we could offer only personal interest and the enticement of the ideas, but no marks for joining the project.

We offered the possibility of the investigation to each of our tutorial groups and followed where the journey led. Each group took up the offer in different ways. This is a piece of the story of one group's thinking.

Remembering toy boxes

We began our first week by drawing something related to a toy box – one that was remembered from home or one that was imagined. The following week, we wrote about our toy boxes or the idea of a toy box. More photographs were added to the collection and discussion took us in different ways. One group was interested in the socio-political aspects of toy boxes – Who has them?

What about the people who can't afford toys?
What other containers are used to hold toys?

Another group became intrigued by the question of Treasure chests – What do adults have instead of toy boxes?

> …which spilled over into private memories and pieces of the past in shoe boxes and jewelry cases…
> …which spilled over into hiding places and treasured places to play…
> …which became the willow tree with its secret special places hidden under its leafy trailing wands.

This is a collection of our writing and pictures and thoughts, some of our words, and some of the ideas which grew from our sharing. We offer them for your musing.

Lisa wrote:

> *The toy box that I had as a child was gotten rid of a long time ago. However, I have never given away any of my toys and soft bears that I had as a child. My toys have come with me from each of my childhood houses, to the one I'm in right now.*
>
> *The toys I have kept, now take pride of place in a walk-in wardrobe. They are all scattered on the top shelf of the cupboard specifically placed so I can see each and every one…*

and Amanda:

> *toy box…what's a toy box? Growing up I always remember my most treasured toys carefully arranged around the perimeter of my bed, with a small, thin stripe down the centre for my body…I absolutely adored the feeling of being enclosed by these toys!*

and Sharmeeta:

> *I remember the first time I was presented with my special toy box. I was five years old…this toy box as I remember vividly was not only significant to me in relation to its aesthetic appeal; the detail and work that went into its intricately and precisely woven rattan in the unique shape of a basket. In fact the basket was traditionally used in the harvesting of paddy in the fields of the outskirts of Malaysia…*

and Catherine:

> *After our discussions last week on toy boxes, I went home and talked to Mum. It was funny that what I remembered was totally different to those memories my Mum has. While I remember having a big chest to store dress-up clothes, my Mum says that me and my sister only had a big cardboard box. With this box, we used to tip all the toys out and would often put blankets or sheets over it, to make a little cubby house…*

and Sue:

> *I do not have a memory of toy boxes. As one of nine siblings we tended to keep our toys separate…and in our own little space. It was very important for me that my toys were not communal, but were mine – I didn't have many and I had to share so many other things.*

and Ken:

> *My toy box was a connection between my mother, her father and me. I remember being five or perhaps six and my Grandad cutting and sanding the wood pieces in his garage. I had to stand at the door while the saw was on, peering through the flying sawdust and rubbing my eyes...*

I could keep telling you these stories and you'd probably ingest more that matters about diversity than you will remember from the rest of the talk, but I feel obliged to go on.

That brings us to the story of a fourth year student teacher's requirement during a field placement to teach "pirates" because it was in the school's local HSIE curriculum. From a social justice perspective, student teachers at IEC have been taught NOT to "do pirates" because of the reality of the pirate experience for many of our newest Asian migrants. For them, a pirate is not someone with a funny patch over one eye and a parrot on his shoulder, yelling, "heave ho, me hearties" with Disney enthusiasm. This new millenium pirate is part of a mercenary nautical gang that has attacked your family or tried to sink your boat as you were trying to escape the atrocities of local warfare in another country. This is a topic of survival, not of entertainment. In any case, given this circumstance, our student noticed that children were particularly interested in the idea of treasure, hiding it and making maps to find it. As part of this exploration she explored with them what treasure might be.

Now, if we think back to the Treasure Box story, this is a wonderful opportunity for each family to contribute a story of something which is considered to be a treasure - perhaps a button which a great grandmother brought with her when she escaped from a war in Poland, or a collar which used to be worn by a favourite pet, or a concert program booklet which is a reminder of a once in a lifetime opportunity to participate in a major event. It will probably not be bags of gold or silver or diamonds and rubies, but treasure steeped in personal experience. This is a curriculum opportunity which embeds diversity in the curriculum, and which by so doing, meets fundamental HSIE objectives (and early childhood goals), as well as the principles of making parents partners in schooling (rather than just minding the tuck shop), and valuing what knowledge each child beings to school (rather than a narrow focus on colour shape and number). It also promotes deep rather than surface learning, and demonstrates that outcomes can still be met while personalising learning.

Which again brings us back to silencing. I have said that it was not possible (nor perhaps desirable) to have a representative of every type of diversity sharing in this presentation. Does that absence mean that the only voice you hear is mine? American accented Australian residented middle aged middle classed female provocateur? I hope not. Maybe, like Richard Johnson, all I can do is wave a flag, not weakly apologising for what I cannot do, but strongly speaking for what we all can do. We can all pause in our work to see whose world is being celebrated.

I am reminded about an observation by Barbara Backshall from Auckland at the early childhood research conference in Canberra this year. She was talking about the implications for early childhood practice of different cultures of time. I was annoyed that she hadn't spoken the year before to enable us to include her work in our Unpacking conference last year - which focussed on time (Fleet and Robertson, 2000). (If you were there and want to revisit it or you missed it and are curious, the Proceedings are available for sale). In any case, she was challenging us to think about the dissonance between some of our timetables and routines and the view of time held by children from different cultural groups in our centres. In her conclusion about time orientation, she reminded us that:

> *...rules vary between cultures and sometimes societies. A good example is that for some it is rude to arrive on time, for some it is rude to arrive late and for a third group of people, the time is not set but the task of coming together is of the utmost importance.* (Backshall, 2001, p11)

When we think about recognising diversity in our work, we must include a consideration of differences, but we must move beyond the most obvious. For example, we might not have thought about peoples' different perceptions of time. This is an interesting area to investigate as we tried to demonstrate last year. In addition, are we listening to those who speak different languages or value different things than we do? How do we resolve our dilemmas when diversity becomes conflict? when different versions of child-rearing or different cultural groups collide in our centres? Can we just make sure that we talk to more people- more families, visit other communities than our own, listen to peoples' stories and try to understand their perspectives, to recognise their intentions?

A few years ago (1997), sitting in the formal, elegant flag bedecked Town Hall in Reggio Emilia, Janet and I (and a few others of you here with us today) were part of a group that had an opportunity to pause and listen to someone else's story. The hall was looking magnificent because the town had just celebrated the bicentennial anniversary of the creation of the Italian flag, which had taken place in that same piazza, two hundred years earlier. We were at that point of an international delegation where representatives from different countries stood to thank our hosts and to share their impetus for joining the delegation or a glimpse of their home country or their vision for their local future. Jan Millikan spoke powerfully on our joint behalf about the impact of the ideas from Reggio Emilia on the Australian scene and others followed suit.

Near the end of the queue of passionate people, there was a single speaker, a woman travelling on her own who worked in a refugee camp in the region of an Arab/Israeli disputed border. She spoke briefly and quietly about the richness of the ideas that were being offered to the rest of the world by the Reggiani. She concluded by saying that she now had a challenge of interpretation herself, that she wanted to find a way to celebrate the richness of children's thinking in a site where sadness and crisis were entrenched, where there were no attractive centres, no resources, where all her children had was their own name.

Most of us, thankfully, are not in such stark circumstances. We may, however, need to revisit some of our basic assumptions or the ways that we work to accommodate the richness of possibilities around us without thinking only in terms of physical resources. We may need to remind ourselves to listen more thoughtfully to the interactions in our environments. Do we look at our planning and recording to see if the variety around us is reflected in the daily experiences of the children? Do we establish relationships with families that help all of us respond comfortably in unfamiliar situations?

We are wise to be reminded of the provocations from Reggio Emilia, of the *Brains exchanging ideas* and the *mouths exchanging possibilities*. These children know the potentials from interaction. The adult commentary with this drawing by the five year olds and a picture of staff talking is:

> *The teachers meet to discuss the morning's events. Whenever we can, we have these daily reconnaisance meetings while everything is still fresh. In discussing events together, our individual interpretations and hypotheses can be compared and consequently take on new substance and meanings.*
> *(Shoe and metre,* 1997, p31*).*

We can look at the work presented in our provocation, our *"Exhibit-on"*, valuing the extraordinary insight and respect which is offered there. This way of working is, among other things, an attempt to offer each child- and potentially each family- a voice. It can enable each child to be seen and heard in conversation with others, with themselves and with the environment. The teaching which accompanies these insights attempts to recognise the authenticity of each experience rather than transmitting a predetermined way of being. Olneck (2000) reminds us that:

> *The incorporation of students' cultural repertoires reorganizes school practices in ways that dissolve dichotomies by which minority students had been classed negatively. For example, it can have the effect of redefining as "relevant" rather than "tangential" or "off the point", the perspectives that students bring to the classroom.* (p324)

While we are looking beyond culture in this discussion of diversity, even beyond the everydayness of the cultures which we each own, this perspective of recognition and valuing is critical. It takes us back to my opening comments regarding the ownership of knowledge and the locus of power for deciding what is valued in the classroom. Presumably we are all trying to extend our blinkered visions of teaching and learning which have been shaped by our own experiences, and to make visible those who have been made invisible because of our normalising educational frameworks.

How do we translate these grand intentions to daily life? Does the recognition of difference mean that all points of view are equally valid, that for example, children can choose whether or not to wear hats in the sun? No. Does it mean that individuals can choose to be rude because that's the currency of the streets? Probably not. But somewhere between the sweeping generalisations and the frustrating particulars, there is a Thirdspace (Soja, 1996) of opportunity, something which is bigger than any of our current conceptions of what is meant by individuality or diversity, something which is richly complex and fluid and outside categorisation or labelling.

Continuing to seek that will bring us closer to being able to title this space. I suspect we need to start by adding the element of the interrogative:

Diversity: Silenced?

Thank you.

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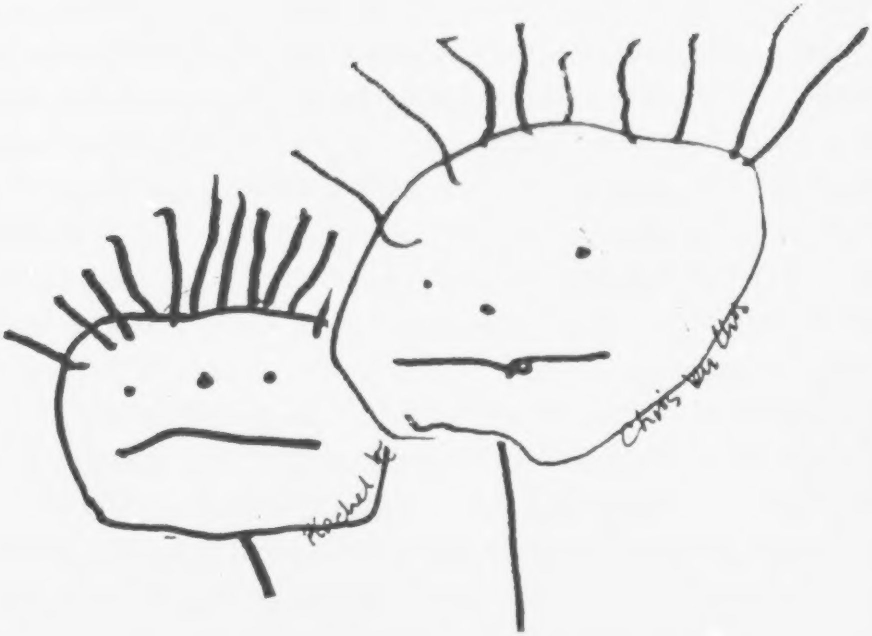
Dialogue with Reggio : What are some possibilities for primary schools?

Lesley Studans



Dialogue with Reggio : What are some possibilities for primary schools?

Lesley Studans

A small thought before we begin

This seminar uses the term "Dialogue" in a similar sense I think to Alma Fleet's definition given yesterday; that is, more than a discussion but an ongoing to-ing and fro-ing wrestling with the provocations from the Municipal Schools from Reggio Emilia. As I was listening to Alma and thinking about today's session (which possibly means that I wasn't really listening at all) I began to think that I wasn't really talking about a dialogue. In my desire to focus on what could be possible within a primary school context perhaps a better word for me at this stage is "Conversation" which implies a friendly kind of exchange. I should be having a dialogue , I should be tackling some of the tougher issues and I feel that I will, but for me at this moment, or up to this moment, action and finding a kind of consensus have been my goal.

About myself

I have been teaching for 19 years with childbearing 'breaks', mostly in Catholic schools in the western Sydney area of Sydney. Without really being aware of when and where I started, I have been on a long but satisfying journey to match my beliefs about children with my practices. This journey has by no means ended and I don't yet know where it will take me.

During four years spent in an early Childhood setting I discovered the Municipal early childhood schools of Reggio. The dialogue or conversation began.

Four years ago I returned to a primary school setting. Should the dialogue be abandoned? The answer was no. The remnants of my entertainment curriculum with whizz bang lessons and stickers and all kinds of rewards was rejected due to pressure from the children who were used to far better in a school that used Bloom's Taxonomy and other techniques to add depth to the children's learning.

An opportunity too good to miss came up 3 years ago.I applied for and was given a salary loading officially called the Special Projects Position to investigate "scaffolding". With the principal's blessing a great adventure began, bringing ideas from Reggio into a kindergarten class in a North Parramatta Catholic Primary School. It has crossed my mind that the moral obligation to deliver something in return for the salary loading has more than anything been responsible for getting me started. Then I put that thought out of my mind and start to think what a noble, brave person I am!

In my endeavours, Janet Robertson and Alma Fleet and everyone who comes to the Sydney meetings of Research have been amazingly supportive of me. Without this support I know I would not have been able to keep on going and have never been able to think through these issues with any depth.

About my school

A word or two about the context in which I work. I am fortunate to work in a Catholic School in the Parramatta Diocese of Sydney. The Parramatta Catholic Education Office encourages innovations in education and reflective practices in its teachers. Some examples -The Exemplary Teacher's Award of $3000 for which a reflective portfolio of work has to be presented, Principals are given the flexibility to use money for such things as Special Projects. As there are so many new schools for our growing region some schools have been set up with innovative ideas. One such school is Holy Cross, Glenwood which is based on Gardner's multiple intelligences. The keystone of Catholic Education in our diocese is a Religious Education curriculum document called "Sharing Our Story". It is based on co-operative learning techniques and shows great respect for children.

The first years of school have been given a priority through the Early Childhood Committee. In 2001 we had our own Early Childhood conference called Sharing Childhood at which Alma Fleet was one of the keynote speakers. Kindergarten teachers have their own support network and a web site. These initiatives have chiefly been begun and supported by Jan Glazier, an educational consultant of the diocese. Last year both Jan and I visited Reggio Emilia. Amazingly I began my Special Projects investigation without knowing about Jan's Early Childhood committee and she had decided to go to Reggio before she knew about me! (It took Alma Fleet to introduce us! Was this Catholic karma?)

A further word about catholic schools for those who may not be familiar with them. It's a common perception even among parents that the catholic parish school is an elite institution, but I would dispute this. School fees are approximately $300 a term but no child is denied an education because their parents can't afford it. A school like mine, St Monica's, North Parramatta, has a small enrolment (160 children) and is in a culturally rich area, children from all the religions of the world and children with no religion are accepted. My Kindergarten class has 25 children of the aforementioned variety and from many cultures and economic circumstances. The children in my class mirror the children of Australia today in their diversity of backgrounds. Clearly an education that can embrace this diversity is necessary to give these children the very best year for their first year of their Primary Schooling.

Impossibilities versus possibilities. Now we start getting to the point.

There's no point in denying that there are a great many obstacles to putting the ideas of Reggio Emilia into some form of practice. You've no doubt heard them and indeed thought them. I know I have. Recognise these thoughts?

> *...They've got 2 teachers per class and a beautiful environment, in Australia we would never get the money for that!*
>
> *...The respect Italian society has for children just doesn't happen in Australia!*
>
> *...I only have some children for 1 or 2 days; how can they be part of a long term investigation? What do the rest of the children do?*
>
> *...and so on and so on and so on....*
>
> *In the context of Primary School education there are perhaps even more barriers.*
>
> *... I have no money for play equipment and no allocated time for play!*
>
> *...How can I have extended investigations when I have a school scope and sequence chart showing that Kindergarten has to complete 1 science and*

technology unit and 1 HSIE unit and 1 PDHPE unit every term? How can I integrate in this environment?

...Parents expect their children to bring home worksheets and homework....

...My Principal says....

...My staff won't like it...

...It is incompatible with outcomes based education...

...the other Kindergarten teacher has the parents on her side and she doesn't believe in working his way...

and so on and so on and so on...

By focussing on the obstacles it's hard to see the trails around them, the tunnels through them and the obstacles that are perhaps illusionary when you take a closer look.

A couple of years ago after seeing a stage production of Going On a Bear Hunt, some children in my Kindergarten class decided to get a bear to come to our classroom. A more impossible desire to support I could not have imagined. However via a clay cave, life sized models of bears and a jungle helicopter, a bear was finally brought to our class. Those children did not think of the obstacles. They just got on with the business of building a cage and devising a trap. They had confidence and knew the importance of imagination. Those qualities they lent to me, as I had almost certainly lost them over my years of teaching.

So I prefer to focus on what is possible. Like the bear hunters I get on with it and like those children, with some support, just might achieve what seems to be impossible. As the now hackneyed saying goes..."The journey of a 1000 miles begins with a single step".

The ideas in practice from Reggio Emilia are very big, mountainous, global ideas and so it is tempting to make big changes to match the enormity of the concepts. However, I believe that using small steps it is easier to negotiate ways around the obstacles. It has occurred to me that perhaps since those obstacles are uniquely Australian, the education that results from finding pathways amongst the obstacles will be authentic to Australia.

What are some of the possibilities?

Warning: this is my first attempt at using metaphors!

You have to start somewhere. Doors and doorways are a symbol for entrances and beginnings and so the door is the metaphor that I use. If you like your metaphors to sound grand you could substitute portal for door.

I'm concentrating on the possibilities of beginning because I'm standing here in front of you and I know many of you are sitting there wondering how to begin or how to move further and I don't want to stand here next year. I want one of you to be standing here doing this presenting job.

There are many doors through which to enter into a dialogue with Reggio Emilia. I'm sure I have identified only a few. One has the name *Projettazione/ Extended Investigations* printed on it, another is named *Environment*, another *Listening to Children* and still another *Documentation.* Once you enter through a door and begin, you may find as I did that simply by beginning, the children's learning and your learning about their learning, acquires a momentum that bounces over small obstacles especially your own fears and doubts as you go along for the ride.

The extended investigations entrance

As Jan Millikin talked about yesterday, the American nametag on this door looks very scratched and battered as emergent curriculum, project approach, convergent curriculum were all written and then scratched out and painted over to be replaced by the word "Projettazione" roughly translated into extended investigations (by Janet Robertson).

This may feel like a familiar door entered before with a different name such as discovery learning, project, theme work. Thus it may be an easy door to enter by. Perhaps your school already has a practice of open- ended tasks whereby the children are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. Perhaps the integration of HSIE, Science and Technology with maths, literacy and creative arts is encouraged. If this is so, then this may be the best door for you.

However, the extended investigations door may be deceptively easy as extended investigations are not superficial themes, the children are not left to discover all by themselves. The teacher plays a very active role in supporting and challenging their thinking.

Outcomes are often given as the main reason for not leaving the familiar tracks of traditional teaching to develop extended investigations. However, I believe that in the context of Primary education, you can see them to be part of the compass that Carlina Rinaldi, Reggio educator, says to take when you 'abandon the timetable' for the learning journey of Projettazione.

I did not know this when I started an investigation into counting which led to the children developing theories about counting water. An excerpt from this documentation is in Exhibit- On. For the documentation of this investigation I took the relative outcomes from the NSW Curriculum document. Finally it dawned on me that the learning of the children was not incompatible at all with the outcomes. In fact it would be difficult to achieve some of these outcomes in a very traditional Kindergarten classroom. The outcomes achieved were in the Working Mathematically section of the outcomes which speak about developing questioning, strategies to solve problems, expressing mathematical ideas, verifying solutions, reflecting on their experiences and using technology (defined as appropriate use of a range of materials, equipment and electronic devices....does this seem familiar?). In fact it would be difficult to achieve some of these "outcomes" in a very traditional Kindergarten classroom. I believe "outcomes" is one of the obstacles that I referred to earlier, that on closer inspection can turn out to be an illusion.

Another obstacle to developing extended investigations is time. If you ask yourself what is a waste of the children's time, then you can find time by eliminating such timewasters. For example, several speakers today (Christine Stevenson, Margaret White and Mary Featherstone) have spoken about very young children's incredible perception of colour. Why then all the emphasis in many Kindergarten classrooms on colour names? One school near me has colour days where on yellow day the children eat yellow food, wear yellow , make yellow craft. They do this in the beginning weeks before they begin the usual timetable. This is not my approach.

Of course I observe the children's understanding of colour. This year I only had one child, Anthony, who could not name colours with red, blue, and so on. Instead he called them fire, water, banana, and so on. Arabic is his first language and he had not learned the names for colours in either Arabic or English, but remarkably had made his own names! It obviously did not take long for Anthony to learn their much less poetic, conventional names. In the time the other school spends on colour days, I could begin an extended investigation into the children's interest in playing witches that resulted in them creating a system of witches' writing and gave me much valuable information about their understanding of writing which has proved to be invaluable in developing their literacy. Many more insights, perhaps more valuable still, about their fears of starting school and how they began to form a learning community, came from this investigation.

The environment entrance

I imagine this to be a beautiful, minimalistic door, perhaps in shiny chrome or some other lustrous metal but with a tricky handle and a very steep staircase just behind it. This is because in the context of Primary school education, environmental change can be a lot more difficult to achieve. This is mostly to do with money and how it is allocated by Principals. Looking at the poor environment in many schools, perhaps it is the most important area and so the most worthy of attention. I'm just not sure that it is the best way to start.

The environment door should have a warning sign, "Reggio Emilia can't be bought" . Owning light boxes, light, airy environments, a specialist art area, does not mean that you are in a dialogue with Reggian ideas. Without other elements and in particular an image of children as strong and powerful, it will be another superficial adaptation until the next enthusiasm comes around. Storerooms of schools are full of Maths equipment, reading schemes, and so on, all bought by some enthusiast who then moves on.

There is a side entrance also named *Environment*. I imagine that this entrance has coloured vinyl streamers hanging from it to keep out the flies. Entrance through this door enables changes to the layout of the classroom e.g. areas to discuss and have class meetings, making materials accessible to the children, a message exchange system of some sort, displays of photographs and documentation of the learning. Making these changes allows for the smooth operation of the classroom creating an environment that is rich in possibilities for the children's learning.

This is as far as I have been able to make changes in my own classroom environment , however, it occurs to me that these changes are only a beginning. If I leave my classroom, the next teacher can easily dismantle all that I have done. Most of the contents of my writing centre will probably end up in the storeroom along with the discarded Maths equipment and reading schemes. I need to make changes that can't be easily dismantled and they are big changes; so I do have to go through the grand glossy entrance and climb those steep stairs (or at least put a flyscreen on the side door). I don't yet know how.

The listening entrance

This may be a good door to enter if your school uses co-operative learning techniques whereby the children are encouraged to talk and listen to each other. It then becomes a logical but significant step for you to listen to the children - what are they saying, doing, what are they thinking? Once you begin to listen to the children and then explore the implications for the children's learning from what you hear and interpret, you are then on the way to developing extended investigations and to changing your teacher's role from director to collaborator. Once you begin to record for yourself what the children are saying, it then becomes a small step to share the children's words with their families and your colleagues. Next there is a small but significant step to developing documentation of learning.

Listening to children doesn't necessarily take a long time and so may be a good way to start in an environment that is "time poor", with no time for play or opportunity to deviate from the scope and sequence plan.

The documentation entrance

This is a way into a dialogue with the ideas of Reggio Emilia that perhaps leads to the most significant advances. If you like a challenge and would like to start with a few strides rather than the more timid steps that I have been suggesting, then this is the way for you. In my own experience, it was only when I began to document that I truly began to think about my practices in a broader framework as suggested by my counting water story. And it was only when I began to share documentation with parents that I truly began to make some deep connections with the families of the children in my class. As you might imagine by my style, it took me some time before I was able to do this.

Even though I was informing the parents about the extended investigations and the way I used play, I was afraid of the parents' reaction to the documentation - to me this was a mountainous obstacle. I liked to have their approval, but I was overwhelmed by their response. Their comments show an appreciation of knowing what their children have been learning in great depth and show appreciation of the underlying processes of learning through use of the imagination, creative expression of their ideas and being part of a group. Perhaps this is another illusionary obstacle.

I'm not entirely sure that the parents are not being overly polite and so I'm searching for other ways to invite their comments rather than through a written comment at the end of the documentation. A parent recently commented to me that the other parents who liked the witches writing documentation (he had some misgivings) were probably better educated than him and I felt he had a valid comment. He was perhaps telling me that he didn't understand the documentation and felt uneasy about this. When we talked, I discovered that culturally, witchcraft was a very real fear to him and perhaps another reason for his unease. This parent is the only parent who has ever commented negatively.

What pathway did I choose?

There are many pathways, many entrances perhaps even multiple entrances, back doors and servants' entrances.

I fear now that I might be mixing my metaphors when I talk about pathways. Perhaps the doors to open in order to begin a dialogue with Reggio are along the pathway or perhaps I should just stop using metaphors.

I began my journey (is this another metaphor?) with extended investigations and some minor changes to the environment and moved from this to refining my techniques for listening to children and responding to what I heard. I then was able to encompass the idea that there could be many interpretations and that it was O.K. to be subjective. Indeed it is impossible to be an objective listener. Thus I began on the way to producing documentation, eventually sharing this with the parents.

Now with Jan Glazier's encouragement, I am able to move beyond my classroom and its still evolving and imperfect practice to begin to make visible to the wider school community and the diocesan school community, the strong powerful Kindergarten child in their presence. (Remember Jan was the education consultant from my diocese who went to Italy with me.)

For this next move, the Exhibit-On exhibition will be important. I am going to invite my school community to come and see it and the children who are in the display to see the respect that others have for their children and all children. I am going to invite our area administrator and the teachers of Holy Cross whose school is founded on the idea of multiple intelligences. *I feel strong and empowered and all through taking a few timid steps!*

Epilogue: some possibilities suggested by others in the seminar

While not fully developed, these glimpses suggest further directions for dialogue:

- **The questioning door**- refining the sorts of questions that you ask the children . This door received a gold star in my small steps theory as it is an easy but worthy place to start. How we ask questions is at the heart of teacher-student power relationships.
- **The using parents who have specialist expertise door** - to help you utilise some materials such as clay that you don't have expertise with.
- **The collegiality door** - starting with a group of teachers together

- **The images door aka the anti-deficit door-** describing children using only positive language as a catalyst for developing teacher's understanding each child's potential. This is another gold star suggestion in line with the small steps theory, a small action that promises to have significant changes in action.
- **The partnerships in learning door-** focussing on the teacher- child partnership

I look forward to the discussion.

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